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SC calls 16-yr delay in acid attack trial 'nat'l shame'

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Rupee recovers from record low level

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Joe Root scores maiden Test century in Australia

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Over 550 IndiGo flights cancelled, 100 alone from Bengaluru

MUMBAI, 4 DEC

The country's largest airline, IndiGo, on Thursday, cancelled around 550 domestic and international flights from Bengaluru, Delhi, Mumbai and other airports, as disruptions continued.

Many IndiGo flights were also delayed at airports, as crew woes and adjustments to schedules weighed on the operations of the airline.

The airline, which generally operates around 2,300 flights daily, recorded an on time performance of 19.7 per cent on Wednesday. There were at least 118 flight cancellations at the Mumbai airport, 100 at Bengaluru, 75 at Hyderabad, 35 at Kolkata, 26 at Chennai, and 11 at Goa. Based on data from the six main airports of Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, Kolkata, Bengaluru and Hyderabad, IndiGo's punctuality nosedived to 19.7 per cent on Wednesday.

Sources said the airline has been facing an acute crew shortage since the implementation of the second phase of the FDTL (Flight Duty Time Limitations) norms. Meanwhile, IndiGo CEO Pieter Elbers said the airline's immediate goal is to normalise operations.

In a message to the staff, he admitted that the airline could not live up to its promise to provide a good experience to customers. IndiGo on Thursday informed aviation regulator DGCA that it will reduce flights from December 8 and stable flight operations will be fully restored by 10 February, 2026. *—PTI*

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Passengers wait in queues at IndiGo airline's counter at Kempegowda International Airport in Bengaluru **PHOTO: PTI**

2 INDIGO PLANES GET BOMB THREATS

An IndiGo flight from Madinah to Hyderabad was diverted to Ahmedabad on Thursday after the airline received a bomb threat, police said.

The aircraft landed safely at the Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel International Airport at around 12.30 pm, Deputy Commissioner of Police Atul Bansal said.

An email was sent to IndiGo claiming a bomb had been placed on the plane. Meanwhile, in Hyderabad, the Rajiv Gandhi International Airport (RGIA) received a bomb threat via email on Thursday concerning an Indigo flight from Sharjah. Flight 6E 1422 landed safely here at 3.15 pm, they said. *—PTI*

Cong expels rape-accused MLA Mamkootathil

T'PURAM, 4 DEC

Congress on Thursday expelled suspended MLA Rahul Mamkoottathil from the party's primary membership after multiple serious complaints, including two sexual assault cases, were registered against him. The move came shortly after a Thiruvananthapuram court dismissed his anticipatory bail plea in the first rape case. Mamkoottathil, who has been absconding since the case was filed, was suspended earlier and had resigned as Youth Congress state president after actress Rini Ann George accused "a young leader" of misbehaviour. *— PTI*

>>>More on Page 4

India to get barrier-free highway tolls soon

NEW DELHI, 4 DEC

Union Minister Nitin Gadkari on Thursday said India's current toll collection system will be phased out within a year and replaced by a fully electronic mechanism enabling seamless travel on highways. Speaking in the Lok Sabha during Question Hour, he said the new system has already been launched at 10 locations and will be expanded nationwide within a year, eliminating the need for vehicles to stop at toll plazas. Gadkari informed the House that 4,500 highway projects worth Rs 10 lakh crore are underway. He cited the National Payments Corporation of India's National Electronic Toll Collection (NETC) programme, which uses FASTag — an RFID-based device affixed to vehicles — to enable automatic payments. He said the government will adopt innovative, barrier-free tolling through a Multi-Lane Free Flow system that integrates Automatic Number Plate Recognition with AI analytics and FASTag. *—PTI*

K'taka Cabinet clears hate speech bill

It penalises those involved in hate speech & crime

BENGALURU, 4 DEC

Karnataka Cabinet on Thursday approved eight draft bills, including key legislation aimed at tackling hate speech, hate crimes, cattle slaughter, and social boycotts. State Law and Parliamentary Affairs Minister **HK Patil**, briefing reporters after the meeting, said the bills will be tabled during the upcoming legislative session in Belagavi.

Among the major proposals is the Karnataka Hate Speech and Hate Crimes (Prevention) Bill, 2025, designed to curb the spread, publication, and promotion of content that threatens social harmony. The Bill introduces penalties for individuals and organisations involved in hate speech or hate-motivated offences. Patil said the move was essential to address growing concerns around divisive content.

The Cabinet also cleared the Karnataka Protection of People from Social Boycott (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Bill, which seeks to prevent families and individuals—particularly in rural areas—from being ostracised by community groups. Officials said the legislation aims to promote social reform by outlawing coercive or discriminatory practices linked to social boycotts.

Other bills approved include amendments to the Bayaluseeme Area Development Board Act, 1991, and the Malnad Area Development Board Act. The proposed changes will allow members without an elected legislative constituency, including certain Legislative Council members, to serve on the respective development boards. Patil noted that the amendments strengthen representation and administrative flexibility. Both bills will be introduced in the Legislature.

The Cabinet also approved the Karnataka Hindu Religious Institution and Endowment (Amendment) Bill, the Shree Chamundeshwari Kshetra Development Authority (Amendment) Bill, and the Karnataka Inland Water Transport Rules Bill. Additionally, the Cabinet gave its nod to Karnataka Prevention of Slaughter and Preservation of Cattle Bill. *—PTI*

>>>More on Page 2

SC tells states to assign more staff for SIR to ease pressure on BLOs

NEW DELHI, 4 DEC

Taking note of a plea about the extreme work pressure faced by Booth Level Officers (BLOs) engaged in the special revision of the electoral rolls, the Supreme Court directed the states on Thursday to consider deputing additional employees to reduce their working hours.

The court was hearing an application filed by actor Vijay's party, Tamilaga Vetri Kazhagam (TVK), seeking a direction to the Election Commission (EC) not to take forcible action under the Representation of the People (RP) Act against the BLOs for not performing the duty in a time-bound manner and pointing out that many of them have committed suicide due to work pressure.

A bench of Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justice Joymalya Bagchi took note of the submissions made by senior advocate Gopal Sankaranarayanan, who appeared in the matter for the TVK, that some instructions have to be issued as many BLOs, who are either teachers or anganwadi workers, have died due to the extreme pressure exerted on them by EC officials.

Sankaranarayanan said that EC officials are also getting FIRs lodged against the BLOs if they fail to perform their duties.

The CJI said the states should consider deploying additional staff so that the work pressure is reduced.

The bench said that if any employee has any "specific reason" for seeking exemption from SIR, the competent officer can consider such requests on a case-by-case basis.

During the hearing, Sankaranarayanan said FIRs under section 32 of the RP Act have been filed by the poll panel against BLOs. *—PTI*

AMID UKRAINE TRUCE TALKS

Putin arrives in Delhi to a red carpet welcome

NEW DELHI, 4 DEC

Russian President Vladimir Putin on Thursday evening began a nearly 27-hour visit to India, aiming to strengthen a nearly eight-decade-long bilateral partnership that has remained resilient despite a turbulent global environment.

The visit comes at a sensitive juncture for both countries. Putin arrives after rejecting the latest US-backed Ukraine peace proposal, buoyed by recent Russian advances on the battlefield.

Putin's last visit to India was in 2021, shortly before Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, which isolated Moscow internationally. At that time, US-India relations were stable, but the re-election of Donald Trump later disrupted this balance with punitive tariffs and inflammatory rhetoric, placing Delhi in a difficult position.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi welcomed Putin at New Delhi's Palam airport with a warm hug, marking the first in-person meeting in four years. The two leaders left the airport in the same vehicle, recalling their joint travel in Tianjin during the SCO summit. Modi is hosting a private dinner for Putin, reciprocating hospitality extended during his Moscow visit in July 2024.

The summit, to be held at Hyderabad House on Friday, is expected to focus on defence cooperation, energy ties, trade, and small modular reactors. Both sides will seek to shield India-Russia trade from external pressures, including the impact of recent US sanctions on Russian oil.

India's procurement of Russian crude has caused a widening trade deficit, with annual imports from Russia at around USD 65 billion, while exports to Russia stand at USD 5 billion.

Agreements are expected to facilitate the movement of Indian workers to Russia and enhance logistical and defence cooperation. *—PTI*

>>>More on Pages 3 & 6

PM Narendra Modi broke protocol to personally receive Russian President Vladimir Putin at the Delhi airport. The two leaders later posed for a pic while travelling to PM's residence **PHOTO: PTI**

Govt denies report of new $2-billion nuke sub deal

The government on Thursday denied a Bloomberg report claiming India and Russia had finalised a $2-billion deal to lease a nuclear-powered submarine. Press Information Bureau said no new agreement had been signed and that the submarine mentioned relates to a 2019 contract, with delivery due in 2028. The report said pricing issues had slowed talks but cited officials who inspected a shipyard.

RaGa alleges he is not allowed to meet dignitaries

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Thursday alleged that the government advises visiting foreign dignitaries not to meet the Leader of the Opposition, calling it a break from long-held tradition. His remarks came ahead of Russian President Vladimir Putin's India visit. The Centre dismissed the charge, saying it plays no role in determining whom foreign leaders choose to meet.

HC bins TN's plea, allows lighting of lamp on hill

MADURAI, 4 DEC

The Madurai Bench of the Madras High Court on Thursday junked Tamil Nadu government's plea to stay a single-judge order permitting the lighting of the traditional Karthigai Deepam oil lamp at the Dheepathoon, an ancient stone pillar on Thirupparankundram hill, home to the Subramaniya Swamy Temple.

A division bench of Justices G Jayachandran and KK Ramakrishnan declined to interfere with Justice GR Swaminathan's 1 December ruling, which allowed the ritual, noting that the nearby Dargah is at least 50m away and would not be affected. The judge also said the temple management's duty to maintain long-standing traditions and restore abandoned practices that do not violate morality.

BJP CHIEF ARRSETED

Following the order, Tamil Nadu BJP chief Nainar Nagenthran, petitioner Rama Ravikumar, and other activists attempted to climb the hill to light the lamp. Police, citing a state appeal to the Supreme Court, stopped and detained them, including Nagenthran, who are expected to be released once the situation stabilises. *—PTI*

QUASHES CASE AGAINST MAN

Recording woman not engaged in 'pvt act' isn't voyeurism: SC

NEW DELHI, 4 DEC

The Supreme Court has held that taking photographs or recording a woman without her consent does not constitute voyeurism under Section 354C of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) if she is not engaged in a "private act". A bench of Justices N Kotiswar Singh and Manmohan made the observation while upholding a Calcutta High Court order quashing a criminal case against a man accused of wrongdoing after he allegedly photographed and filmed a woman during a property-related dispute.

The case dates back to March 2020, when the complainant filed an FIR under IPC Sections 341 (wrongful restraint), 354C (voyeurism) and 506 (criminal intimidation). She alleged that on 18 March, the appellant stopped her from entering a property in Kolkata and intimidated her by taking photographs and recording videos without her permission.

Following the investigation, police filed a chargesheet in August 2020. However, the Supreme Court agreed with the High Court that the allegations did not meet the legal threshold for voyeurism. The bench noted that Section 354C applies only when a woman is watched or recorded while engaged in a "private act" in circumstances where she would normally expect privacy. Such acts include exposure of intimate parts, using a lavatory, or involvement in sexual activity.

The Court held that the FIR and chargesheet contained no claim that the complainant was involved in any such act. It concluded that the material did not disclose an offence under Section 354C, and therefore affirmed the High Court's decision. *—Agecnies*

No GST on leasing out residences as hostel: SC

BENGALURU, 4 DEC

The Supreme Court on Thursday held that leasing out of residential premises to an entity which is using it as hostel for students and working professionals is exempted from GST.

A bench of justices JB Pardiwala and KV Viswanathan upheld the verdict of the Karnataka High Court which said that leasing out of residential premises to an entity which is using it as hostel to students and working professionals is exempt under GST.

"The ultimate use of the property as residence remains unchanged. However, if 18 per cent GST is levied on this transaction... the same would ultimately be passed on to the students and working professionals which would lead to a situation where the legislative intent behind granting exemption for residential use is defeated," the bench said.

The top court was hearing a plea filed by a co-owner of the residential property having 42 rooms in the City. The petitioner along with other co-owners executed a lease deed in favour of the lessee, namely M/s D Twelve Spaces Private Limited.

The petitioner sought clarification with regard to its eligibility to seek exemption for the renting services provided and filed an application before the Authority of Advance Ruling, Karnataka. The AAR, Karnataka held that the renting of residential dwelling for use as residence is not covered under entry 13 and the benefit of exemption according to notification is not available. *—PTI*

Cops seize 18kg of ganja worth Rs 18 crore

BENGALURU, 4 DEC

Bengaluru police on Thursday arrested a couple accused of smuggling 18 kg of hydroponic ganja worth Rs 18.6 crore into the city. Officials said the duo, aged 34 and 26, acted as mules for an international drug syndicate and had brought the contraband from Thailand by hiding it in food packets inside their luggage, bypassing airport and Customs checks. Mahalakshmi Layout police nabbed them on November 30 following a tip-off. Two mobile phones were seized, and the pair has been remanded to 10 days' police custody. Further investigation is underway. —*PTI*

BLR Lit Fest to start on 6 December at Freedom Park

BENGALURU, 4 DEC

The Bangalore Literature Festival (BLF) returns on 6 December for a two-day celebration themed around "Space." Held at Freedom Park, the venue is expected to shape the festival's atmosphere in new and unexpected ways. With many renowned voices and, of course, new books and bibliophiles. BLF continues its strong focus on young readers through the Children's Literature Festival, ensuring younger audiences feel included. The festival will be multilingual, featuring sessions in Kannada, Hindi, Urdu, Tamil, Malayalam, and Sanskrit. This year's lineup features names such as Banu Mushtaq, Shashi Tharoor, Vir Das, Clare Mackintosh, Karen Hao, Gauri Shinde, and Chetan Bhagat —*Salar News*

Cops seize 1,143kg of sandalwood worth Rs 1 crore

BENGALURU, 4 DEC

Bengaluru police seized 1,143kg of red sandalwood and three cars worth Rs 1 crore and arrested one person involved in an inter-State smuggling racket operating across Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, officials said. The case began on 7 November when officers of Hulimavu Police Station received a complaint from a Bhatmidhar stating that a car was parked illegally on Bannerghatta Main Road. Police then nabbed the suspect and 95 kg of red sandalwood and a car from his possession. He was produced before the court on 8 November and remanded to police custody for 20 days. Based on information from him, police recovered 1,143kg of red sandalwood and three cars. —*ANI*

Spl court to rule on MUDA case on 18 December

BENGALURU, 4 DEC

The Special Court for MLAs and MPs will pronounce its order on 18 December on petitions challenging the Lokayukta police clean chit to Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, his wife BM Parvathi, and others in the Mysuru Urban Development Authority (MUDA) land allotment case. The court will rule on the "B final" (closure) report filed by the investigating officer. The case, pursued by activist Snehamayi Krishna, is also being followed by the Enforcement Directorate. The Lokayukta Police had cleared the accused in February, citing lack of evidence. The FIR alleges that 14 compensatory plots were allotted to Parvathi in Mysuru's Vijayanagar Layout, valued higher than her original 3.16-acre land, allegedly aided by Siddaramaiah's influence. Parvathi reportedly had no legal title over the acquired land, raising questions over MUDA's 50:50 allotment scheme. —*PTI*

Cabinet clears post-event Rs 100 crore for Invest K'taka

Officially drops Devanahalli land acquisition project

RATLAM/ BENGALURU, 4 DEC

The Karnataka Cabinet has granted post-event administrative approval for enhanced expenditure on the "Invest Karnataka 2025" summit, raising the total outlay to Rs 100.70 crore from the earlier approved Rs 90 crore.

The revision follows additional infrastructure requirements, investor-support arrangements, and field-level activities that became necessary during the planning and execution of the Bengaluru Palace–hosted event, Karnataka Law and Parliamentary Affairs Minister HK Patil told reporters after the cabinet meeting.

The Minister said these unavoidable components led to a modified cost structure implemented through the Event Management Agency. The Cabinet had initially sanctioned Rs 90 crore for organising the earlier "Invest Karnataka 2023" summit, but the total expenditure reached Rs 100.70 crore.

The Cabinet also gave administrative approval for the Rajiv Gandhi University of Health Sciences (RGUHS), Gadag, to establish advanced skill laboratories across six cities at a total cost of Rs 452.89 crore.

The centres will come up in Kalaburagi, Davanagere, Mangaluru, Bhimanakuppe near Kengeri in Bengaluru, Mysuru and Gadag. Kalaburagi will host a dedicated simulation facility.

RGUHS will fully fund the Rs 452.89-crore project from its own resources and execute it in three phases.

The government also approved skill-lab centres for Gadag and Bhimanakuppe—locations not mentioned in the Budget.

It gave nod to build 19 Morarji Desai Residential School in the State at an expense of Rs 304 crore.

The government also dropped the acquisition of 1,777 acres of land in 13 villages under Channarayapatna Hobli of Devanahalli Taluk in Bengaluru Rural district, the Minister said.

There was widespread protest against the acquisition of land by the Karnataka Industrial Area Development Board (KIADB) for the aerospace park.

The Cabinet also cleared the Karnataka Prevention of Slaughter and Preservation of Cattle Bill. "This is something related to the establishment of slaughterhouses. It pertains to the Government of India grants," Patil said.

The Cabinet cleared amendments to the Karnataka Hindu Religious Institutions and Charitable Endowments Act, 1977, to remove discriminatory provisions against individuals affected by leprosy. The revised Bill will be placed before the House.

The government approved changes to the Shree Chamundeshwari Kshetra Development Authority (Amendment) Bill, paving the way for appointing Group 'A' senior officers from the Religious Endowments Department as Secretaries to the authorities. —*PTI*

AFTER WIFE'S COMPLAINT

Guv's grandson booked for dowry harassment

RATLAM/ BENGALURU, 4 DEC

Devendra Gehlot, grandson of Thawarchand Gehlot, and his wife Divya *PHOTO: X*

The granddaughter-in-law of Karnataka Governor Thawarchand Gehlot has accused her husband and in-laws of severe domestic violence and harassment over a dowry demand of Rs 50 lakh.

In a written complaint to Ratlam Superintendent of Police Amit Kumar in Madhya Pradesh, Divya Gehlot, wife of Devendra Gehlot, 33, alleged mental and physical abuse, an attempt to murder, and repeated threats, according to News18.

Divya claimed her intoxicated husband threw her off a roof on 26 January after pressuring her to bring money from her parents.

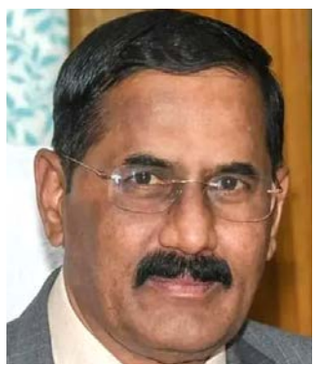
She said she sustained injuries and was taken to a hospital only the following morning, first to a private facility in Nagda and then referred to Bombay Hospital in Indore in critical condition.

She further alleged that her in-laws, former MLA Jitendra Gehlot, 55; brother-in-law Vishal Gehlot, 25; and grandmother-in-law Anita Gehlot, 60, regularly harassed her, denied her food, taunted her, and prevented her from meeting her four-year-old daughter.

Divya claimed key details about her husband, including alleged drug addiction and extramarital affairs, were concealed before their marriage under the Chief Minister's Kanyadan Scheme in 2018. Reacting to the allegations, Jitendra told NDTV that the family "will present all the facts before the media." —*Agencies*

Upalokayukta alleges 63% corruption; BJP calls for probe

BENGALURU, 4 DEC



After Upalokayukta Justice B Veerappa alleged that corruption was rising in the State, the Opposition BJP has demanded a probe into the allegations.

Speaking at a public event on Wednesday, Veerappa said that there was 63 per cent corruption, with Karnataka ranking as the fifth most corrupt states in the country. He warned that there was a dangerous trend in the State.

The BJP, which lost the 2023 elections after the Congress ran a lengthy 40 per cent corruption, picked up on the comments and demanded that Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and his Deputy DK Shivakumar stepped down.

"Will you take moral responsibility and resign?" Opposition Leader R Ashoka wrote on X. "Or will you continue this sham life? The Congress party, which won 136 seats through lies, malicious propaganda, and deceit, if it dissolves the assembly and faces elections now, won't even get 36 seats. This is my guarantee."

Later speaking at a press conference, Ashoka also demanded a CBI probe.

Meanwhile, BJP State President BY Vijayendra said the party's fight would not stop "until this utterly corrupt, anti-people Congress government is thrown out." He asked on X if the Congress' goal was to achieve 100 per cent corruption. —*Salar News*

ROUTINE INSPECTION

Traffic police fine commuters for violating traffic rules, at the Ambedkar veedhi in Bengaluru on Thursday *PHOTO: X*

Buy farmers' maize: Govt to poultry feed producers

BENGALURU, 4 DEC

The State government has permitted poultry feed manufacturers to buy maize directly from farmers at MSP-linked prices for the 2025-26 Kharif season to ease procurement bottlenecks and support growers.

The order follows a proposal from the Department of Animal Husbandry and Veterinary Services after consultations with feed manufacturers. According to the Commissioner's note, the Chief Minister, at a meeting on 1 December, asked manufacturers to directly purchase about five lakh tonnes of maize.

Manufacturers said they were willing to buy directly if poultry-feed quality was ensured and advance payment requirements remained low. At a follow-up meeting on 2 December, the Karnataka Poultry Farmers & Breeders Association said MSP-quality maize has about 14 per cent moisture. They agreed to procure maize with moisture not exceeding 12 per cent, beginning with 5,000 tonnes and a 20 per cent advance payment.

DGR WRITES TO CENTRE FOR RUBBER MSP

Health Minister Dinesh Gundu Rao has written to the Centre, urging the Union government to allocate an MSP for rubber. The Central Government considered rubber crop as a commercial crop and has excluded it from the scope of MSP, he said. He said that prices of rubber in State collapsed due to cheap imports from abroad. —*PTI*

Open paddy procurement centres: Ashoka

BENGALURU, 4 DEC

Opposition Leader R Ashoka urged the State government to open paddy procurement centres immediately. He said that favourable rains in the Mandya and Mysuru regions has yielded a bountiful harvest of paddy. He alleged that the centres were not opening the centres because they claimed there was no space and excessive moisture content. Ashoka said the Congress should follow the example of Punjab and install drying machines at the paddy procurement centres to expedite the procurement process. Earlier, farmers bodies in Mysuru had demanded Rs 500 per quintal over the Centre's Fair and Remunerative Price (FRP) of Rs 2,369 for paddy. Ashoka also urged the government to follow states like Kerala, Odisha, and Telangana and declare the Rs 500 incentive for farmers. —*Salar News*

Didn't meet High Command in Delhi: DKS

BENGALURU, 4 DEC

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar on Thursday rejected reports that he met Congress High Command leaders during his visit to Delhi, amid ongoing speculation about a power tussle in the state. He said he had travelled solely to attend a private wedding and to discuss preparations for the Congress rally on 14 December, at Ramlila Maidan, organised to protest alleged "vote chori".

Shivakumar said the party aims to bring about 300 workers and leaders from each district, with travel and accommodation arrangements handled by the Working President and an AICC Secretary. He accused the media of "creating news" without substance, insisting that "every day is good news for us".

Speculation over leadership changes has grown since the Congress government reached the halfway point of its term, though recent meetings between Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and Shivakumar have been seen as attempts to ease tensions.

- DK Shivakumar said everyday is "good news for us (Congress)" because the media keeps bringing their names up

He added that the Chief Minister has postponed a planned meeting with State MPs and Opposition leaders on 8 December. —*PTI*

Darshan gets a TV in jail, ahead of 'The Devil' release

MYSURU, 4 DEC

A court in the City directed the prison authorities to install a television in the cell housing actor Darshan and other accused in the Renukaswamy murder case. The directive follows a request made by the accused.

The 57th Additional City Civil and Sessions (CCH) court has also summoned Renukaswamy's parents as witness in the next hearing on 17 December.

Jail officials said a TV will be provided so that Darshan can follow developments in his case and remain informed about events outside prison. However, it also comes a day ahead of the release of the trailer for 'The Devil', a Kannada movie starring the actor. The film is set to be released on 11 December.

The order comes after the court had approved other requests made by Darshan and others, including an extra bed, pillow, and bedsheet. The court permitted limited movement within the jail. —*PTI*

GOVT PLANS TO EXTEND TELESCOPE SCHEME TO GOVT SCHOOLS

BENGALURU, 4 DEC

The State is preparing to expand its flagship telescope distribution scheme beyond KREIS residential schools to a larger network of government schools, the Minister for Science & Technology, NS Boseraju, said on Thursday.

The proposal for additional funding will be placed before the chief minister during the next budget meeting, he said.

The Minister was speaking after inaugurating a training programme for Karnataka Residential Educational Institutions Society (KRIES) school teachers on telescope management at the Jawaharlal Nehru Planetarium, his office said in a statement.

The initiative is part of the government's push to strengthen astronomy-based learning across the State.

Boseraju said the Department of Science and Technology is keen to extend telescope distribution to more schools, noting that the current project covering KRIES institutions has already achieved a significant milestone. "833 residential schools and PU colleges have each received a telescope, at a cost of Rs 3 crore," he said.

Underscoring the need to cultivate scientific temper and rational thinking among students, he said that many programmes are being rolled out to strengthen science education. —*PTI*

'13 SEPT IS WOMEN EMPLOYEE DAY'

Menstrual leave extended to govt sector

BENGALURU, 4 DEC

The Karnataka government has extended one day of paid menstrual leave per month to employees in the government sector as well. Chief Minister Siddaramaiah announced on Thursday at a Women's Conference's event that 13 September will be declared as Women Employees' Day.

The government had last month issued an order mandating one day of paid menstrual leave a month to women aged 18-52, working in permanent, contractual and outsourced jobs.

It is applicable to women working in all industries and establishments registered under the Factories Act, 1948; Karnataka Shops and Commercial Establishments Act, 1961; Plantation Workers Act, 1951; Beedi and Cigar Workers (Conditions of Employment) Act, 1966; and Motor Transport Workers Act, 1961, it had said.

On 2 December, the government ordered the granting of one day of menstrual leave every month to female government employees of the State with immediate effect. Menstruating women government employees between the age group 18 and 52 are eligible to avail this leave.

The authority competent to grant casual leave may grant menstrual leave, and no medical certificate is required to avail this leave, the order said.

This leave should be entered separately in the leave/attendance book, and should not be combined with any other leave, it added.

Siddaramaiah said that women should cultivate a scientific and rational temperament and remove superstitions, only then can a rational society be built.

Meanwhile, the Bangalore Hotels Association (BHA) had recently approached the Karnataka High Court challenging the menstrual leave policy.

The association has questioned the very basis of the order, highlighting that the State itself has not extended such leave to women working in government departments. —*Agencies*

Minority couples who opt for modest wedding to get Rs 50K

MYSURU, 4 DEC

MLA Tanveer Sait directed the district administration officials to identify minority couples for the State government-sponsored Simple Marriage Scheme.

Chairing a review meeting of Minority Welfare Department schemes held at the office of the Deputy Commissioner in Mysuru on Thursday, he said that minority couples in the district will get Rs 50,000 as marriage aid if the couple gets married at a simple function.

He said the Department of Minority Welfare will cover 5,000 couples in the current fiscal across the State, including 150 couples in Mysuru district.

A bride should be aged between 18-42 and the groom between 21-45. Muslim, Christian, Jain and Buddhist couples will get an aid if they marry at mass marriage events organised by non-profit organisations.

This will cost the exchequer Rs 25 crore, Sait said. Non-profits which organise mass marriages will also get an incentive of Rs 5,000 per couple, costing Rs 2.5 crore.

The couple's annual income must be less than Rs 5 lakh to become eligible. —*Salar News*

PHOTO: PTI

JD(U)'s Narendra elected Bihar Deputy Speaker

PATNA, 4 DEC

Veteran JD(U) leader Narendra Narayan Yadav was unanimously elected Deputy Speaker of the Bihar Assembly on Thursday. Speaker Prem Kumar announced his election unopposed through a voice vote. Yadav, a seventh-term MLA from Alamnagar in Madhubani district, had first assumed the post last year, succeeding Maheshwar Hazari, who joined Chief Minister Nitish Kumar's cabinet. Recently, he served as pro tem Speaker following his appointment by Governor Arif Mohammad Khan, a role he held until Tuesday when Prem Kumar was elected Speaker. Yadav's election underscores his extensive legislative experience and cross-party support in Bihar. *—PTI*

2 held with Rs 15 cr heroin, China-made guns in Rajasthan

JAIPUR, 4 DEC

Police in Rajasthan's Hanumangarh district have arrested two alleged traffickers and seized heroin worth about Rs 15 crore, along with two China-made pistols and 14 live cartridges, officials said on Thursday. The arrests were made late Wednesday during patrols near Rohi Nagarana in the Sangaria police station area. The accused, Bhupendra Singh, 43, of Bathinda, Punjab, and Nasir, 23. of Deeg, Rajasthan, were caught travelling in a Haryana-registered SUV. Police recovered 3.08 kg of heroin and the weapons from a bag in the vehicle. Both have criminal histories and were allegedly acting on instructions from an overseas handler. Investigators suspect the consignment was smuggled from Pakistan. *—PTI*

Sushma Swaraj's husband Swaraj Kaushal no more

NEW DELHI 4 DEC

Former Mizoram governor and senior advocate Swaraj Kaushal, husband of late BJP veteran Sushma Swaraj, passed away on Thursday afternoon at the age of 73. He was rushed to AIIMS by his daughter, BJP MP Bansuri Swaraj, following complaints of chest pain, but doctors declared him dead, the Delhi BJP said. Kaushal's mortal remains were cremated at Lodhi Road crematorium in the presence of Union Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal, Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta, BJP Delhi president Virendra Sachdeva, and other party and RSS leaders. A distinguished lawyer, Kaushal was designated a senior advocate by the Supreme Court at 34. He served as the first Advocate General of Mizoram in 1987 and closely handled insurgency issues in the North-East. He successfully defended former defence minister George Fernandes in the Baroda dynamite case during the Emergency and played a key role in negotiating the historic Mizoram Peace Accord of 1986, securing the release of Mizo leader Laldenga. Kaushal became the youngest state governor at 37, serving Mizoram from 1990 to 1993, and later represented Haryana Vikas Party in Parliament, including a Rajya Sabha tenure from 1998 to 2004. Born in 1952 in Solan, Himachal Pradesh, he studied law at Panjab University. Bansuri Swaraj, in an emotional post, remembered her father's affection, discipline, patriotism, simplicity, and patience as the guiding light of her life. *—PTI*

India & Russia target $100 billion trade

Amid standoff with US, India aims to strike an oil deal with Moscow; Will also buy S-400 missiles

An artist makes a poster of Russian President Vladimir Putin In Amritsar on Wednesday *PHOTO: PTI*

NEW DELHI, 4 DEC

India and Russia have set an ambitious target of $100 billion in bilateral trade by 2030, officials confirmed as Russian President Vladimir Putin arrived in India for a two-day state visit.

Speaking to reporters, Maxim Oreshkin, Deputy Chief of Staff in the Russian Presidential Executive Office, said, "President Putin and Prime Minister Modi have set the target of $100 billion by 2030. We believe the key source of this increase will come from India's exports of goods and services to Russia."

Ahead of the summit, defence ministers from both countries met to discuss India's plans to procure additional S-400 missile systems and potential acquisition of Su-57 fighter jets. India is evaluating fifth-generation jets, including Dassault Rafale, Lockheed Martin F-21, Boeing F/A-18, and Eurofighter Typhoon. Defence Minister Rajnath Singh reaffirmed India's commitment to building its indigenous defence industry for both local production and exports, while exploring niche technology collaboration with Russia.

Trade discussions are expected to focus on addressing India's rising trade deficit due to large-scale procurement of Russian crude oil. Russia has offered additional discounts following a decline in Indian purchases triggered by US sanctions, including a 50 per cent tariff on Indian goods and a 25 per cent levy on Russian crude. Energy cooperation, free trade agreements with the Eurasian Economic Union, and expanded exports in pharmaceuticals, agriculture, food products, and consumer goods are also likely on the agenda.

India's purchases of Russian crude have surged from 2.5 per cent pre-Ukraine invasion to 35 per cent of total oil imports, although US tariffs have curtailed volumes. Weapons sales remain a central pillar of bilateral ties, underscoring Moscow's view of India as a key economic partner. The visit carries geopolitical significance, signalling Russia's commitment to a "multi-polar world" and its strategic partnership with India, while New Delhi tests its strategic autonomy by balancing ties with Russia alongside relations with the West and Europe. *—PTI*

PM Narendra Modi and Russian President Vladimir Putin applaud dancers at the Palam Air Base in New Delhi on Thursday *PHOTO: PTI*

Banned in EU for propaganda, RT channel to launch in India

Russian President Vladimir Putin will inaugurate RT India's TV broadcast on Friday from its Noida Film City studio. Part of Moscow-based Russia Today, the channel will air four daily English bulletins focusing on geopolitical news and analysis from India and South Asia, to present an "alternative narrative" to Western media. RT India seeks to strengthen India-Russia ties despite bans on Russian state media in the EU, Ukraine, Poland, the Netherlands and Belgium. RT, funded by the Russian government, is widely criticised as a propaganda outlet. It is available in India via 18 operators, reaching a potential audience of 675 million.

BLAST FROM THE PAST

India–Russia ties date back decades, with the USSR's top leaders Nikolai Bulganin and Nikita Khrushchev visiting India for an extraordinary 19 days in November 1955, and again in December 1955, following Jawaharlal Nehru's visit to the USSR six months earlier, the Congress said. Their visit laid the groundwork for close Indo-Soviet collaboration, including the Bhilai Steel Plant and IIT Bombay. Jairam Ramesh noted that it later enabled MiG production at HAL, and shaped ONGC, IDPL and several public-sector and private enterprises.

Govt insecure, tells dignitaries not to meet LoP: RaGa

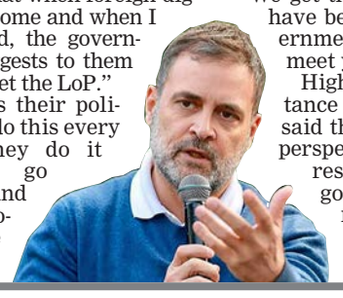
NEW DELHI, 4 DEC

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Thursday alleged that the government tells visiting foreign dignitaries not to meet the Leader of the Opposition due to its "insecurity".

Gandhi's remarks came hours ahead of Russian President Vladimir Putin's visit. The Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha said it is a tradition that visiting foreign dignitaries meet the LoP but Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the Ministry of External Affairs were not following this norm.

"Normally the tradition is that those who come from abroad have a meeting with the LoP. This used to happen during (Atal Bihari) Vajpayee ji's time, Manmohan Singh ji's time, but what happens these days is that when foreign dignitaries come and when I go abroad, the government suggests to them to not meet the LoP."

"This is their policy; they do this every time. They do it when I go abroad and when people come here. We get the message that they have been told that the government has said 'not to meet you'," he said.



Highlighting the importance of such meetings, he said the LoP gives another perspective. "We also represent India, only the government does not represent India," Gandhi said without naming Putin. *—PTI*

Ignoring warning signs: Oppn mocks govt over falling rupee

NEW DELHI, 4 DEC

The rupee's sharp slide past the 90-per-dollar mark triggered strong reactions from the Opposition on Thursday, with leaders accusing the government of mismanaging the economy and ignoring warning signs.

Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge said the currency's fall exposed the country's weak economic fundamentals. Speaking outside Parliament, he recalled Prime Minister Narendra Modi's earlier criticism of the UPA over the rupee's decline. "They keep saying we are developing, but when the rupee falls, it shows the real economic situation," he said. In a post on X, Kharge added that if the government's policies were sound, the rupee "would not have fallen".

Trinamool Congress MP Mahua Moitra mocked the government, saying the rupee was falling because it had "strength and weight". Congress MP Vivek K Tankha raised the issue in the Rajya Sabha, calling the currency's depreciation "the weakest in Indian history". He said the rupee's fall — 20–27 per cent over five years and 5 per cent this year had created "economic pain" for ordinary citizens by raising import costs and fuelling inflation. He cited a USD 40-billion monthly trade deficit, stagnant FDI, slowing external borrowing, and over USD 17 billion in foreign investor outflows as signs of deepening stress. Priyanka Gandhi Vadra also hit out at the BJP, asking what the ruling party had to say now after having criticised the UPA when the rupee weakened during Manmohan Singh's tenure. *—PTI*

Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge speaks at the Winter session of Parliament, in New Delhi, on Thursday *PHOTO: PTI*

US has denied only **62 student** visas in **5 yrs**

2024 saw most road accident deaths

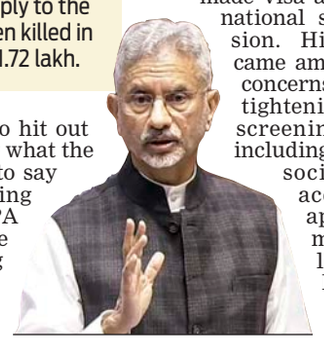
Road accident deaths touched an all-time high of 1.77 lakh in 2024, in India. Road transport ministry in a written reply to the Lok Sabha shared the number of people who had been killed in road accidents last year. In 2023, road crashes killed 1.72 lakh.

Issue of visa is US' sovereign right: EAM

NEW DELHI, 4 DEC

The issuance of visas is the sovereign right of a government, and the United States has the right to decide on visa applications based on national security, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar told the Rajya Sabha on Thursday.

He said the recent announcements made by the United States, with the latest being on Wednesday, have made visa adjudication a national security decision. His comments came amid increasing concerns over the US tightening its visa screening system, including scrutinising social media accounts of applicants, a move that is likely to affect Indian applicants. *—PTI*



'MOSQUE IN MURSHIDABAD'

TMC expels MLA for WB 'Babri Masjid' plan

KOLKATA/ BAHARAMPUR, 4 DEC

West Bengal's ruling Trinamool Congress (TMC) on Thursday suspended Bharatpur MLA Humayun Kabir after he announced plans to build a mosque modelled on the Babri Masjid in Murshidabad. Kabir had said the foundation stone would be laid at Beldanga on 6 December, the anniversary of the Babri mosque demolition in 1992, sparking communal tensions in the Muslim-majority district.

Senior TMC leader Firhad Hakim said Kabir's conduct amounted to gross indiscipline and communal provocation, and the suspension was approved by Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee. Kabir, present at Banerjee's anti-SIR rally in Baharampur, called the move a "deliberate humiliation" and announced he would resign as MLA and launch a new political outfit on 22 December, aiming to contest 135 assembly seats. He accused the TMC of double standards on secular politics and alleged a tacit understanding with the RSS-BJP. However, Mamata said Murshidabad would never accept "politics of riots" and that some "traitors take BJP's money to stoke communal tensions".

Posters for Kabir's programme were reportedly vandalised, and officials confirmed no permission has been granted, with security tightened ahead of the event.

Earlier, Kabir had a history of clashes with the TMC, including a six-year expulsion in 2015 for criticising Banerjee and contesting elections as an Independent and later with the BJP before rejoining the TMC.

A PIL seeking a stay on Kabir's foundation-laying plan and any political involvement in religious construction is likely to be heard by the Calcutta High Court on Friday. The petitioner seeks judicial intervention to prevent communal tensions. *—PTI*

ELECTION SYMBOL TIFF

PMK alleges EC accepted Anbumani's 'forged' papers

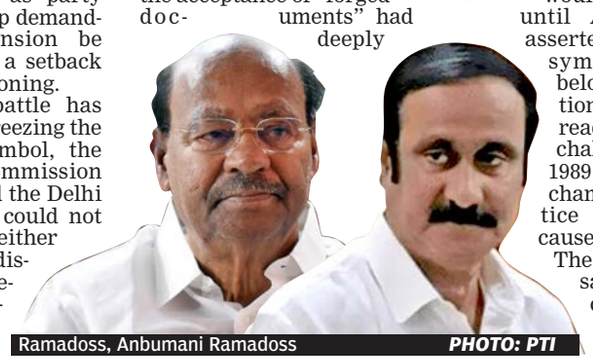
NEW DELHI, 4 DEC

- The leadership battle has resulted in the EC freezing the PMK's election symbol, the mango

A faction of the Pattali Makkal Katchi (PMK) supporting party founder Dr S Ramadoss staged a protest at Jantar Mantar in Delhi on Thursday, alleging that the Election Commission (EC) accepted "forged" documents submitted by Anbumani Ramadoss to extend his tenure as party president. The group demanded that the extension be annulled, calling it a setback to the party's functioning.

The leadership battle has resulted in the EC freezing the PMK's election symbol, the mango, as the Commission reportedly informed the Delhi High Court that it could not allot the symbol to either faction while the dispute remained unresolved. Former honorary president GK Mani accused the EC of "murdering democracy" and said he would approach a civil court. PMK women's wing president Sujata Karunakaran claimed the acceptance of "forged documents" had deeply damaged the party and its cadre.

Anbumani Ramadoss, citing EC and Delhi High Court rulings, maintained he would remain president until August 2026 and asserted that the party symbol rightfully belonged to his faction. He said he was ready to face any legal challenge. Founded in 1989, the PMK has championed social justice and reservation causes in Tamil Nadu. The Ramadoss faction said protests would continue in Chennai and Delhi. *—PTI*



Ramadoss, Anbumani Ramadoss *PHOTO: PTI*

WB BLOs want deadline extension

KOLKATA, 4 DEC

Chaos prevailed at the central Kolkata office of the Chief Electoral Officer, West Bengal, on Thursday after around 400 Booth Level Officers (BLOs) breached police barricades, marched towards the building and held a sit-in.

Seeking an audience with CEO Manoj Agarwal, the protesters demanded an extension of the enumeration deadline of the SIR exercise by at least three months, citing "inhuman stress."

Accompanied by relatives of the four BLOs who had allegedly died unable to cope with SIR stress, the protesters belonging to the TMC-leaning 'BLO Aikya Manch' demanded adequate compensation to the families of the deceased.

This is the second protest at the CEO's office in 10 days, despite the Election Commission directing Kolkata Police Commissioner Manoj Kumar Verma to ensure the safety of officers and staff at the CEO's office, after a security breach by protesting BLOs on its premises on November 24.

The EC has already extended the deadline of SIR enumeration and the publication of draft and final rolls by seven days.

Meanwhile, in Berhampore, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee said that the EC pushed SIR as it was "Union Home Minister Amit Shah's trick" to create panic. She claimed that if her government had not blocked the exercise, the Centre would have imposed President's Rule in the state. Addressing a rally in Muslim-majority Murshidabad, Banerjee urged people not to fear enumeration and to simply file their documents. *—PTI*

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee during a public rally at Berhampore, in Murshidababd district, on Thursday *PHOTO: PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Protest against burqa-niqab ban in Mumbai college

MUMBAI, 4 DEC

Six female students were booked for protesting against a burqa-niqab ban in an educational institution in Mumbai's Goregoan area, a police official said on Thursday. The action was taken after information was received that some women were on a hunger strike outside Vivek Vidyalaya and Junior College after the management enforced a dress code banning burqas and niqabs inside classrooms, he added. "They were protesting without police permission. They also argued with police personnel who asked them to wind up the stir. We have booked six female students, three of whom are unidentified, for unlawful assembly," he said. A video of the protest went viral on social media during the day. *—PTI*

India airlifts bridge system, water units to Lanka

COLOMBO, 4 DEC

India has airlifted a movable Bailey Bridge system and 500 water-purification units to cyclone-hit Sri Lanka as part of ongoing humanitarian support, the Indian mission said on Thursday. The country is reeling from Cyclone Ditwah, which has caused catastrophic floods and landslides, leaving 479 dead and 350 missing, and isolating several districts. An IAF C-17 transported the bridge, engineers, and a medical team to support relief efforts. India also shared a digital disaster-response toolkit with Sri Lankan officials. Sri Lanka's crisis continues to deepen, with 1.6 million people affected, 1,88,000 in shelters, major telecom outages, eight relief-worker deaths, and estimated economic losses of USD 6–7 billion. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

Anoushka's sitar damaged on Air India flight

NEW DELHI, 4 DEC

Sitar virtuoso Anoushka Shankar has said she is "devastated and truly disturbed" after discovering her sitar severely damaged following an Air India flight. In an Instagram video, she showed a crack in the instrument, saying this was the first such incident in 15–17 years, despite using special protective cases. She criticised the airline, noting the irony of an Indian carrier mishandling an Indian instrument. Air India said it had begun a probe, including reviewing CCTV footage at Delhi airport, and was engaging with her to determine how the damage occurred. Several artists, including Vishal Dadlani and Zakir Khan, called the incident "heartbreaking". *—PTI*

HC denies bail to ex-TDB officer over Sabarimala gold

KOCHI, 4 DEC

The Kerala High Court on Thursday rejected the anticipatory bail plea of former Travancore Devaswom Board (TDB) administrative officer S Sreekumar, an accused in cases involving alleged irregularities in the gold plating of artifacts at the Lord Ayyappa shrine in Sabarimala. Sreekumar denies the allegations. The suspected irregularities date back to 2019, when he served as TDB administrative officer. A court-appointed Investigation Team is probing the loss of gold from the gold-plated Dwarapalaka idols and Sreekovil door frames. Six people, including prime accused Unnikrishnan Potty, have been arrested. *—PTI*

SC calls 16-yr delay in acid attack trial 'nat'l shame'

SC asks all HCs to submit details of pending acid attack cases

NEW DELHI, 4 DEC

Describing the tardy trials in acid attack cases as a "mockery of the system," the Supreme Court directed all High Courts to submit details of such pending cases within four weeks.

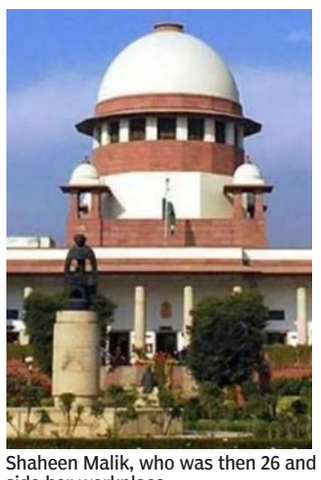
Mooting the idea of setting up special courts for expeditious disposal of acid attack cases, the top court also asked the Centre to consider amending the law through legislation or even an ordinance so that the survivors are formally included within the definition of persons with disabilities.

A bench comprising Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justice Joymalya Bagchi also issued notices to the Centre and the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities on Thursday while hearing a PIL filed by acid attack survivor Shaheen Malik demanding that acid victims should be considered as persons with disabilities.

Solicitor General Tushar Mehta assured the court that the issue would be taken up by the government. The bench termed as a "national shame" the prolonged delay of 16 years in Malik's case, which has been pending since 2009 before a Rohini court here. Malik, who argued personally, said that she was attacked in 2009, but the trial has still not ended.

The CJI said the trial in Malik's case must be held on a day-to-day basis. The CJI said the pendency of cases and including acid attack victims in the definition of persons with disabilities, will be taken up after four weeks.

Malik highlighted the plight of victims who are forced to ingest acid, often surviving with artificial feeding tubes. The CJI expressed shock and said he had heard about the incidents of acid being throw on women but had never come across cases where victims were forced to consume acid. *—PTI*



Shaheen Malik, who was then 26 and pursuing an MBA, was attacked outside her workplace PHOTO: PTI

UP demolition: SC grants week-long protection

NEW DELHI, 4 DEC

The Supreme Court on Thursday granted interim protection of one week to two petitioners facing demolition of their residential and marriage hall properties in Uttar Pradesh, directing all parties to maintain status quo.

A bench of Justices Vikram Nath and Sandeep Mehta asked the petitioners, who said partial demolition had occurred, to approach the Allahabad High Court (HC).

The bench questioned why they had invoked Article 32 instead of moving HC. It warned that entertaining all such petitions would render Article 226 redundant.

The petitioners argued they received no notice, despite last year's Supreme Court judgment requiring show cause notices and 15 days to respond before demolition, except in cases involving unauthorised structures in public spaces. *—PTI*

At least 1,000 residents will be evacuated in Dhanbad district PHOTO: SREENCARP

Gas leaks from J'khand mines

DHANBAD, 4 DEC

Over 1,000 residents in Jharkhand's Dhanbad district will be shifted to safer locations, following the incident of a "poisonous gas leak" from underground mines, officials said on Thursday.

A woman allegedly died on Wednesday, while 12 people fell sick after "carbon monoxide" leaked from such mines in different places of Kenduadih Basti in the district, they said.

The exact cause of the woman's death, however, is yet to be ascertained and it could only be confirmed after receiving the postmortem report, the officials said.

Soon after the incident, the Bharat Coking Coal Ltd (BCCL) started eviction of people from the "danger zones", they said.

The company also pasted notices on walls of houses in the locality, asking people to vacate at the earliest, an official said.

BCCL's Putki-Balihati Colliery Area GM GC Saha told reporters that three ambulances have been kept on standy in the basti to deal with any emergency situation.

"The company is making arrangements to shift the residents to safer places. For safety of life and property, we have already requested them to leave the dangerous zone," Saha said. *—PTI*

Congress expels rape accused Kerala MLA

T'PURAM, 4 DEC

Congress on Thursday expelled suspended MLA Rahul Mamkoottathil from the party's primary membership after multiple serious complaints, including two sexual assault cases, were registered against him. The move came shortly after a Thiruvananthapuram court dismissed his anticipatory bail plea in the first rape case.

Mamkoottathil, who has been absconding since the case was filed, was suspended earlier and had resigned as Youth Congress state president after actress Rini Ann George accused "a young leader" of misbehaviour. His expulsion comes exactly a year after he took oath as Palakkad MLA following a 2024 by-election.

The first case was registered after a woman complained to Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan, who forwarded it to the State Police Chief. She alleged rape and coercion to terminate a pregnancy, and provided an audio clip in which Mamkoottathil purportedly insisted she undergo an abortion. He wrote on Facebook that he would "fight legally" to prove innocence.

Days later, a second rape case was filed by a 23-year-old woman who accused him of luring her to a homestay and sexually assaulting her. Several other women and a transgender person have since levelled allegations.

Meanwhile, Kerala Police have registered 32 cases against individuals who shared defamatory content or revealed the identity of the first complainant. Activist Rahul Easwar was among the first arrested in related cases. *—PTI*

18 Naxals, 3 cops dead in encounter in Chhattisgarh

BIJAPUR, 4 DEC

Six more bodies of Naxalites have been recovered after a major gun battle with security forces in Chhattisgarh's Bijapur district, raising the death toll of Maoist cadres to 18, officials said on Thursday. Three personnel of the District Reserve Guard (DRG) were also killed in the encounter, which lasted around 12 hours on Wednesday.

Inspector General of Police Sundarraj P said 12 bodies were found by Wednesday, while six more were recovered on Thursday as search continued. The three fallen DRG personnel head constable Monu Vadadi, constable Dukaru Gonde and jawan Ramesh Sodhi were honored at a wreath-laying ceremony.

One of the dead Naxalites was Modiyami Vella, a PLGA company commander carrying an Rs 8 lakh reward. This year, 281 Naxalites and 23 security personnel have been killed in Chhattisgarh. *—PTI*

BREATHLESS DELHI

Commuters make their way through thick pollution as water is sprayed around them in New Delhi on Thursday, offering little relief from the choking air. The AQI, though reportedly slightly improved at 299, remained firmly in the 'poor' category after Wednesday's 'very poor' 335. Chief Minister Rekha Gupta said 305 mist sprayers will be installed across nine hotspots to fight toxic air PHOTO: PTI

After 5 years in jail, former DU professor gets bail in Elgar case

MUMBAI, 4 DEC

The Bombay High Court on Thursday granted bail to former Delhi University professor Hany Babu, citing his prolonged incarceration of around five years without trial.

A bench of Justices AS Gadkari and RR Bhonsale directed Babu, who is lodged at the Taloja Prison in Navi Mumbai, to furnish a personal bond of Rs 1 lakh with sureties of the same amount.

While the National Investigation Agency (NIA) sought a stay on the bail order so that it can appeal before the Supreme Court, the HC refused the request, stating that Babu has been in jail for over five years.

The court also noted that the trial is not likely to end anytime soon.

Hany Babu had sought bail citing prolonged incarceration without trial.

His counsel, Yug Mohit Chaudhary, argued that charges had not been framed and their discharge application was still pending before the trial court.

The NIA had accused Hany Babu of being a conspirator propagating Maoism as per the instructions of the banned CPI (Maoist) organisation. He was arrested in July 2020.

The case is based on allegations that inflammatory speeches were delivered at the Elgar Parishad conclave, held at Shaniwarwada in Pune on 31 December, 2017, which police claimed triggered violence the next day near the Koregaon Bhima war memorial located on the city's outskirts. *—PTI*

Hany Babu PHOTO: Wikimedia

Ex-soldier, woman held for spying for Pakistan

AHMEDABAD, 4 DEC

The Gujarat Anti-Terrorist Squad (ATS) has arrested a retired Army man and a woman for allegedly sharing sensitive information about military establishments and personnel with Pakistani agents, officials said on Thursday.

While the accused Ajaykumar Singh was lured by a Pakistani Intelligence officer to provide information about movements of the Army's regiments and transfers of military officers, the other accused, Rashmani Pal, was told to honeytrap certain individuals, they said.

Singh, 47, a resident of Bihar, was arrested in Goa, where he was working at a distillery after his retirement in 2022. Pal (35), originally from Uttar Pradesh, was picked up from Daman, where she used to take tuitions, the ATS said.

The agency said that a Pakistani intelligence officer, 'Ankita Sharma,' was in touch with Singh. Pal, who operated under the fake identity of 'Priya Thakur', allegedly acted at the behest of her Pakistani handlers to extract information by befriending military personnel, said ATS Superintendent of Police Siddharth Korukonda.

Singh was contacted by Ankita when he was a Subedar in the Army in Dimapur in 2022. Singh had allegedly sent the information as text, photos and videos, the official said. Pal, a homemaker, was provided with mobile numbers. *—PTI*

Tezpur university shutdown enters sixth day amid unrest

GUWAHATI, 4 DEC

The shutdown at Tezpur University in Assam entered its sixth day on Thursday as students intensified their demand for the removal of Vice-Chancellor Shambhu Nath Singh. Staff members also rejected Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma's proposal to appoint a pro vice-chancellor, arguing it does not address the core issues.

State Congress President Gaurav Gogoi accused Sarma of "masking the failures" of the VC by suggesting a pro VC. Students have been protesting over alleged corruption and have stopped classes. Tezpur University United Forum (TUUF), leading the stir, rejected the proposal. *—PTI*

INT'L CHEETAH DAY

PM hails growing cheetah population

NEW DELHI, 4 DEC

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday said Project Cheetah aimed to revive India's lost ecological heritage, and invited wildlife enthusiasts worldwide to visit the country to witness the wild cat thriving in its new habitat. In a post on X on International Cheetah Day, he said the government launched the project three years ago to safeguard the species.

Modi said India is now home to several cheetahs, including many born in the wild, with populations growing in Kuno National Park and the Gandhi Sagar Sanctuary. As of December 2025, India sustains 32 cheetahs, including 21 India-born cubs. However, experts maintain the project faces ecological challenges. They argue that India lacks suitable habitat and prey density for free-roaming African cheetahs and warn.

Cheetahs, once found across Central India, went extinct in the country in 1952, with the last confirmed sightings in 1948. Globally, the species is listed as "vulnerable" on Red List, with only 6,517 mature individuals remaining.

Conservationists also stress that African cheetahs are not the subspecies that roamed India, making them an ecologically mismatched choice.

Experts caution that Kuno National Park, with a capacity for around 21 cheetahs, may not sustain a long-term population, noting that each cheetah requires roughly 100 sqkm territory. *—Agencies*

...But, some died

Thirteen cheetahs, including 10 adults and three cubs, have died since the reintroduction project began in 2022. Causes included kidney failure, maggot infections possibly linked to radio collars, hunting-related injuries, and a suspected drowning.

Veteran film producer AVM Saravanan dies

CHENNAI, 4 DEC

Veteran producer and owner of the iconic AVM Studios, M Saravanan, died in Chennai on Thursday due to age-related ailments, sources said. He was 86.

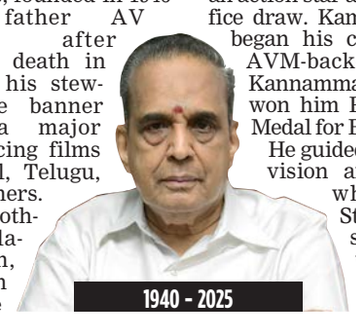
Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M K Stalin paid his respects at AVM Studios, where Saravanan's mortal remains were placed for public homage.

Saravanan took charge of AVM Studios, founded in 1946 by his father AV Meiyappan, after Meiyappan's death in 1979. Under his stewardship, the banner remained a major force, producing films across Tamil, Telugu, Hindi and others.

With his brother M Balasubramanian, Saravanan helped shape commercial Tamil cinema from the 1950s. His productions 'Naanum Oru Penn' (1963) and 'Samsaram Adhu Minsaram' (1986) earned critical acclaim.

When AVM returned to Tamil film production after a long pause, the brothers backed Rajinikanth in 'Murattu Kaalai' (1980), his first film with the banner. The blockbuster cemented Rajinikanth's rise as an action star and major box-office draw. Kamal Haasan also began his career with the AVM-backed 'Kalathur Kannamma' (1960), which won him President's Gold Medal for Best Child Actor.

He guided AVM into television and new media while AVM Studios was a key shooting hub. He was Sheriff of Madras in 1986. *—PTI*



1940 - 2025

MEXICAN FARMERS FIGHT FOR WATER

Dozens of farmers in Mexico City and blocked an entrance to Mexico's Congress on Wednesday with their tractors, protesting the new General Water Law that imposes stricter controls on water use. Farmers allege the law will take water away from the countryside and re-allocate it for discretionary use. They say the proposal threatens their livelihoods and chips away at their fundamental right to water. The farmers brought their demonstrations to the country's capital less than a week after they and groups of truck drivers lifted road and highway blockades in at least seven of the country's 32 states.
PHOTO: SCREENGRAB

IndiGo's lean manpower caused disruption: Experts

Pilots' body Federation of Indian Pilots (FIP) alleged that IndiGo, despite getting a two-year preparatory window before the full implementation of new flight duty and rest period norms for cockpit crew, "inexplicably" adopted a "hiring freeze."

FIP said it has urged the safety regulator, DGCA, not to approve airlines' seasonal flight schedules unless they have adequate staff to operate their services "safely and reliably" under the New Flight Duty Time Limitations (FDTL) norms.

In a letter to the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) late Wednesday, FIP urged the DGCA to consider re-evaluating and reallocating slots to other airlines, which have the capacity to operate them without disruption during the peak holiday and fog season if IndiGo continues to "fail in delivering on its commitments to passengers due to its own avoidable staffing shortages."

On Wednesday, IndiGo cancelled over 150 flights and delayed hundreds by considerable time across various airports due to multiple reasons, including crew shortages resulting from the implementation of the new FDTL norms. On Thursday, at least 300 flights were cancelled.

On 3 December, only 19.7 per cent IndiGo flights arrived and departed on time from six major airports, according to the Civil Aviation Ministry website.

FIP also said it would like to categorically clarify that the recent spate of IndiGo flight cancellations cannot be attributed to the Delhi High Court-mandated FDTL regulations for pilots.

"All other airlines have provisioned pilots adequately and remain largely unaffected due to timely planning and preparation," it said, adding "the current disruption is the direct consequence of IndiGo's prolonged and unorthodox lean manpower strategy across departments, particularly in-flight operations."

On Wednesday, IndiGo cancelled over 150 flights and delayed hundreds of others across the country. On Thursday, at least 300 flights were cancelled
PHOTO: PTI

HOW THE NEW FDTL RULES HIT INDIGO

The new Flight Duty Time Limitations (FDTL) rules that were rolled out in November seem to have severely impacted Indigo's operations. The new norms are aimed at better combating pilot fatigue. Here are the key points:

- Weekly rest period for pilots increased to **48 hours from 36.**
- For pilots working on ultra-long-haul routes (eg; US), pilots get addition 24 hour rest after 2 consecutive flights.
- Pilots can only perform 2 night landings per day, down from the previous 6.
- Definition of night hours extended by an hour (midnight to 6am).
- Airlines cannot roster flight crew members for more than 2 consecutive nights.
- Pilots cannot fly more than **1 hour above the flight duration**, including pre and post-flight duties.

The pilots' body alleged that "despite the two-year preparatory window before full FDTL implementation, the airline inexplicably adopted a hiring freeze, entered non-poaching arrangements, maintained a pilot pay freeze through cartel-like b behaviour, and demonstrated other short-sighted planning practices."

"FIP strongly advocates that the DGCA must approve seasonal flight schedules only after airlines prove they have adequate pilot strength under the new FDTL norms to operate safely and reliably," the pilots' body said.

Following the rollout of phase 1 of the FDTL on 1 July, the FIP alleged that "IndiGo reduced pilot leave quotas, and after phase 2 on 1 November, attempted to buy back pilot leave."

"These measures saw poor response and further damaged pilot and employee morale – especially in a year when airline executives took home record increments approaching or exceeding 100 per cent, while simultaneously blaming pilot migration instead of investing in retention and workplace improvements," FIP said.

With the onset of the busy winter fog season – which naturally demands higher pilot availability – IndiGo still expanded its winter schedule "without recruiting or training additional pilots", raising serious questions about operational responsibility, it stated in the letter.

In line with international regulations, the Indian aviation safety regulator approves two schedules – winter (late October to late March) and summer (late March to late October) for the domestic airlines.

The Gurugram-based airline has received approval for 15,014 flights per week for the ongoing winter schedule, up almost 10 per cent from 13.691 flights per week that it operated last winter.

The latest FDTL norms, which entail increased weekly rest periods to 48 hours, extended night hours, and limiting the number of night landings to only two, as against six earlier, were initially opposed by domestic airlines, including IndiGo and Tata Group-owned Air India.

But they were subsequently rolled out by the DGCA following the Delhi High Court's directives, albeit with a delay of over one year, in a phased manner, and with certain variations for airlines like IndiGo and Air India.

While the first phase of these FDTL norms came into force in July, the second phase, which reduced the number of night landings from six to two earlier, was implemented from 1 November.

The norms were originally to be put in place from March 2024, but airlines, including IndiGo, sought a step-by-step implementation, citing additional crew requirements. *—PTI*

LETTERS

write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

SALAR ساڈا

'India has 2nd highest deaths of children under 5'

About one million children worldwide died before turning five in 2023 due to factors affecting growth, including being underweight, stunted or wasted, with India reporting over 1,00,000 of these deaths, according to a new study.

Nigeria recorded the highest number of under-five deaths linked to 'child growth failure' at 1,88,000, while the Democratic Republic of Congo ranked third, a step below India, with more than 50,000 deaths, the findings published in The Lancet Child and Adolescent Health journal show.

'Child growth failure' increases the risks of death and disability from several diseases, including lower respiratory infections, diarrhoeal diseases, malaria and measles.

The analysis used data from the Global Burden of Disease Study 2023, the latest in the series of assessments that measures health lost due to diseases, injuries and risk factors across 204 countries and territories.

Globally, deaths due to factors affecting child growth have declined from 2.75 million in 2000 to 0.8 million in 2023. However, sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia continue to see substantial and concentrated adverse health effects with more than 600,000 and 165,000 deaths among under-fives, respectively, the researchers estimated.

"The drivers behind child growth failure are complex and cumulative due to feeding issues, food insecurity, climate change, lack of sanitation, or war," said co-author Bobby Reiner, professor at the University of Washington's Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation in the US, which coordinates the Global Burden of Disease study.

"Therefore, no single strategy will improve their health across all regions," he added.

The authors estimated that "in children younger than five years in 2023, CGF (child growth failure) was associated with 79.4 million DALYs lost (disability-adjusted life years lost) and 880,000 deaths."

Being underweight accounted for 12 per cent of deaths in this age group, the highest share, followed by wasting (a form of malnutrition) at nine per cent and stunting at eight per cent.

Seventy-nine per cent of diarrhoeal disease deaths and 53 per cent of lower respiratory infection deaths among under-fives in South Asia were linked to child growth failure. The high-income region in South Asia, which recorded the lowest number of deaths related to growth failure, also saw the lowest fraction of deaths from both causes at about 33 per cent and 35 per cent, respectively.

Most stunted infants show signs of growth failure within the first three months of life, which underscores the importance of interventions before and during pregnancy, the researchers said.

Wasting and stunting can create a destructive loop because stunting increases the risk of future wasting and vice versa, and this cycle worsens as children grow older, they said.

Growth failure in the first few months of life often indicates newborns born too small or too early. In older infancy and early childhood, it may point to other drivers of poor growth like inadequate nutrition, repeated infection or other causes, the team said. *—PTI*

- India reported at least 1,00,000 deaths of children under 5 in 2023, below Nigeria's total of 1,88,000. The Democratic Republic of Congo ranked third more than 50,000 deaths, the findings published in The Lancet Child and Adolescent Health journal show. Globally, deaths due to factors affecting child growth have declined from 2.75 million in 2000 to 0.8 million in 2023.

Most stunted infants show signs of growth failure within the first three months of life ***PHOTO: AI***

Falling rupee makes imports costlier, fuels inflation: Experts

A depreciating rupee will help exporters and the IT sector, but make imports costlier, thus fuelling inflation, according to experts. As the rupee plunged below 90-mark to a US dollar, opposition parties raised concern over its impact on common citizens. The matter was also raised in Parliament.

The rupee rebounded from its all-time low levels and appreciated by 19 paise to close at 89.96 against the US dollar on Thursday, on softness in the US dollar index and on reports of the Reserve Bank of India's supposed intervention.

Forex traders said the greenback fell after ADP non-farm payroll data came in sharply below the forecast, and the softness in the US dollar index supported the rupee at lower levels.

The rupee opened weak earlier in the day and touched an all-time low of 90.43 amid selling pressure from foreign investors and rising crude oil prices. The delay over the announcement of the India-US trade deal has also weighed on the rupee.

"The rupee's fall below 90 against the dollar brings mixed consequences. While export sectors like IT and textiles gain competitiveness, higher import costs for crude and raw materials will squeeze margins and widen the trade deficit," said Rajeev Sharan, Head, Criteria, Model Development & Research, Brickwork Ratings.

He also said that rising inflationary pressures could dampen consumer demand and corporate profitability, while firms with unhedged foreign borrowings may face financial stress.

Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge took a swipe at Prime Minister Narendra Modi over the rupee crossing the 90-mark against the US dollar, recalling that as Gujarat chief minister he had questioned the UPA government over the declining value of the currency.

"Before 2014, Modi ji said - 'What is the reason that India's rupee is getting 'patla (losing its value)', you will have to answer this. The country is demanding an answer from you'. Today, we are asking Modi ji the same question. He will have to answer," Kharge said.

Earlier, speaking with reporters in Parliament, Kharge said since the value of the rupee is declining, it means that the economic situation of the country is not good.

His party colleague and Rajya Sabha MP Vivek K Tankha expressed concern over the sharp depreciation of the Indian currency, saying its fall has created economic pain for the common people.

"I am talking about something which is very topical. The free fall of the Indian rupee and the widening economic pain for the ordinary Indian. The rupee has crashed, past 90 per US dollar... The weakest in Indian history," he said in the Rajya Sabha.

He said a weakening rupee raises the cost of imports, which in turn adds to inflation, affecting the poor and middle class, as well as Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs).

Also, exporters do not benefit much because many export sectors, such as textiles, chemicals, and engineering, rely heavily on imported intermediates.

"For the common person, the falling rupee feels like a salary cut without the employer even informing you, your money buys less every day," the Congress MP said.

Prodigy Finance, an international student lender, said students who are going for higher studies abroad in 2026 will run into a tougher reality.

The combination of a weakening rupee, rising overseas living costs and underestimated budgets is creating a financial risk that families can no longer ignore, it said.

When tuition fees, deposits, and day-to-day living costs abroad are priced in dollars, pounds, or euros, an Indian rupee (INR) loan becomes heavier with every movement in the exchange rate. What looks manageable today can turn into an unexpected financial strain by the time repayments begin.

"The one piece of advice I always give is simple: do not pledge your home or land as collateral. You never know what the market will look like back home," said Sonal Kapoor, Global Chief Business Officer at Prodigy Finance.

- The rupee opened weak earlier in the day and touched an all-time low of 90.43 amid selling pressure from foreign investors and rising crude oil prices

Meanwhile, a report by DBS Bank said that in the past fortnight, the central bank's strong presence across spot, forwards and the NDF markets had prevented a break in the USDINR past 89.00, drawing a de facto line in the sand.

However, the swift move past 90/USD this week could be interpreted as a shift in the response function to allow the unit to find its new equilibrium to better reflect underlying macro shifts.

The need to maintain the currency at competitive levels stems from a delay in the US-India trade deal, unfavourable tariff differentials at this juncture, weak equity portfolio flows and a broader focus on manufacturing/ exports, it said.

Forex traders said multiple pressures, like foreign fund outflows from equities and lingering uncertainty over the Indo-US trade deal, are keeping investor sentiment fragile. *—PTI*

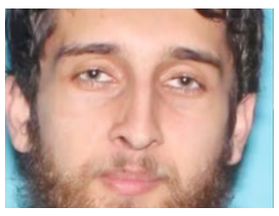


PHOTO: SCREENGRAB

Pakistani student arrested for 'plotting' US attack

CLAYMONT, 4 DEC

A University of Delaware student was arrested when police found a notebook containing written attack plans that named a campus police officer as his target. Authorities said Pakistani immigrant Luqmaan Khan, 25, was parked unlawfully and was detained for being uncooperative. Police searched his car, finding not only the notebook but also a handgun with ammunition. The notebook also contained writings about "urban warfare" and "martyrdom" ,said an FBI special agent. A later search of his home turned up a scoped rifle, body armour and a handgun modified with an illegal machine gun and a notebook with plans. Khan has been in federal custody since his arrest on 24 November. Khan is scheduled for a detention hearing on 11 December. *—PTI*

Doctor sentenced for selling Matthew Perry ketamine

LOS ANGELES, 4 DEC

Dr Salvador Plasencia pleaded guilty to selling ketamine to deceased actor Matthew Perry. The 44-year-old doctor has been sentenced to two-and-a-half years in prison and fined USD 5,600. In 2023, Perry died from an overdose after years of struggling with depression and addiction. The judge emphasised that although Plasencia didn't provide the ketamine that killed Perry, he still helped fuel the addiction that led to Perry's death. "You exploited Mr Perry's addiction for your own profit," she said. Perry's mother, stepmother and two half-sisters gave tearful victim statements before the sentencing. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

Luigi's hearing continues on 1yr anniversary of case

NEW YORK, 4 DEC

A high-stakes-hearing in the murder case against Luigi Mangione continued Thursday, exactly one year after prosecutors say he fatally shot United Healthcare CEO Brian Thompson. Mangione, 27, has pleaded not guilty to state and federal charges. His lawyers are seeking to block jurors from hearing his alleged statements to police and evidence — including a 9 mm handgun and a notebook — taken from his backpack. Prosecutors say the gun matches the murder weapon and the notebook contains writings expressing anger toward health insurers. *—PTI*

Massive power outage hits Cuba

HAVANA, 4 DEC

A major blackout hit Havana and western Cuba on Wednesday, leaving millions without power as the island grapples with chronic outages from its failing electrical grid. The nearly 12-hour blackout snarled activities in the capital and beyond. The outage was, reportedly, caused by a failure on a transmission line that connects two major plants. Although the power grid is now operational once again, the government has warned that the restoration of electricity would not be immediate and that generation deficits would persist. A total blackout hit Cuba in September, with officials blaming ageing infrastructure and fuel shortages at power plants. The ongoing outages also affect water service and impact the island's fragile business sector. *—PTI*

Want H1B, H4 visa? Make socials public

US increases screening of students, techies for security, clamping down on immigration

NEW YORK/ WASHINGTON, 4 DEC

The US government has expanded screening and vetting measures for H1B visa applicants and their H4 dependents, directing them to keep the privacy settings on all their social media profiles set to "public".

The State Department said on Wednesday that beginning 15 December, a review of the online presence for all H1B applicants and their dependents will be conducted.

Students and exchange visitors were already subject to such scrutiny, which has now been extended to include those applying for H1B and H4 visas.

"To facilitate this vetting, all applicants for H1B and their dependents (H4), F, M, and J nonimmigrant visas are instructed to adjust the privacy settings on all of their social media profiles to 'public'," the State Department said.

The State Department said that online presence will be reviewed starting 15 December *PHOTO: AI*

The department said it uses all available information in screening and vetting to identify visa applicants who are inadmissible or pose a threat to America's national security or public safety.

"Every visa adjudication is a national security decision," it said.

The directive is the latest in a series of steps by the Trump administration to tighten immigration rules.

The administration has launched a massive crackdown to check abuse of the H1B visa programme, used largely by US technology companies to hire foreign workers. Indian professionals form one of the largest groups of H1B visa holders.

In September, US President Donald Trump issued a proclamation, titled 'Restriction on Entry of Certain Nonimmigrant Workers', imposing a one-time USD 100,000 fee on new H1B work visas.

Washington has also paused with immediate effect Green Card, US citizenship and other immigration applications for people hailing from 19 "countries of concern", following the shooting of National Guard soldiers by an Afghan national. *—PTI*

Nigerians 'violent against Christians' may not get US visa

ABUJA, 4 DEC

The US will restrict visas for Nigerians and their family members involved in mass killings and violence against Christians in the West African country, the US State Department has said.

The attacks on the community are part of a longstanding and extremely complex security crisis in Nigeria — a nation recently singled out by US President Donald Trump for "the killing of Christians" by "radical Islamists".

Last month, Trump also said he has ordered the Pentagon to begin planning for potential military action in Nigeria following the claims of Christian persecution.

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio on X said the policy would apply to other governments or individuals engaged in violations of religious freedom, and that the restrictions are in line with a new policy under the Immigration and Nationality Act.

It wasn't clear how Wednesday's policy would be implemented, as the State Department already has the ability to restrict travel to the US by those involved in human rights abuses. *—PTI*

HEGSETH'S 'SIGNAL' USE RISKED US PERSONNEL: PENTAGON WATCHDOG

The Pentagon's watchdog found that Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth put US personnel and their mission at risk when he used the Signal messaging app to convey sensitive information about a military strike against Houthi militants in Yemen. The findings ramp up the pressure on the former Fox News Channel host.

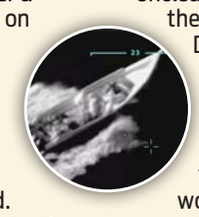
Hegseth had accidentally added a journalist to a Signal group chat with senior officials where he provided the timings of warplane launches and bomb strikes before the soldiers were even airborne.

42 LAWMAKERS WANT SANCTIONS ON PAKISTANI OFFICIALS

Forty-two members of the US Congress, led by Democratic Congresswoman Pramila Jayapal and Congressman Greg Casar, wrote to Secretary of State Marco Rubio demanding sanctions against senior Pakistani officials for an "escalating campaign of transnational repression and worsening human rights crisis in Pakistan". The letter said US citizens who have spoken out against abuses in Pakistan have faced harassment. The lawmakers called for visa bans and asset freezes on officials responsible.

GOVT KNOWINGLY KILLED SURVIVORS ON 'DRUG BOAT'

The Pentagon knew there were survivors after a September attack on an alleged drug boat in the Caribbean Sea and the US military still carried out a follow-up strike, sources said. The Trump administration says all 11 people aboard were killed. What remains unclear was who ordered the strikes and whether Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth was involved. Some legal experts and lawmakers say that the follow-on strike would have violated peacetime and armed conflict laws.



Russian drones killed at least 3 people in Ukraine, while Kyiv's strikes killed at least 2 people in Russia-occupied Kherson *PHOTO: X @ZELENSKYYUA*

Israel identifies Thai farmer's remains; only 1 hostage left in Gaza

BANGKOK/ JERUSALEM, 4 DEC

The remains that the militants in Gaza handed over to Israel as part of the first phase of the ceasefire deal were those of a Thai farmhand, Israeli and Thai officials said Thursday.

The return of Sudthisak Rinthalak's remains leaves just one last hostage to be returned.

Rinthalak, 42, was employed at Kibbutz Be'eri. Israeli officials said the Thai was killed on 7 October, 2023 during the Hamas-led attack. He was declared dead on 16 May, 2024.

Thai Foreign Ministry spokesperson Nikorndej Balankura said all 31 Thai hostages were returned. Of them, 28 were returned alive and three dead.

Thais were the largest group of foreigners to be held in Hamas captivity *PHOTO: PTI*

Thais were the largest group of foreigners to be held in captivity. In addition to the hostages, 46 Thais were killed.

Israeli Ran Gvili is now the last hostage whose remains are to be returned.

Meanwhile, Israel launched an airstrike on a Hamas militant in southern Gaza in retaliation for an attack earlier in the day that wounded five Israeli soldiers. *– PTI*

Tribunal issues warrant against Hasina's son

DHAKA, 4 DEC

A special tribunal in Bangladesh issued an arrest warrant against deposed prime minister **Sheikh Hasina's** son, **Sajib Wajed** Joy. This comes a month after his mother was sentenced to death on charges of committing crimes against humanity related to the student-led movement, July Uprising, which toppled ex-premier Hasina's Awami League regime on 5 August.

The UN rights commission office reported 1,400 deaths between 15 July and 15 August. Bangladesh's International Crime Tribunal (ICT-BD) handed down the death penalty to the ex-premier and her then home minister, Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal.

The War Crimes Tribunal (ICT-BD) formally charged former law minister Anisul Huq and investment adviser Salman F Rahman for their involvement in mass killings during a curfew. The tribunal ordered them, along with former junior ICT minister Palak, to appear in court on 10 December.

Joy, 54, an information communication expert who served as the ex-premier's ICT affairs adviser, currently lives in the US. *—PTI*

Putin wants to end war, but path unclear: Trump

WASHINGTON, 4 DEC

US President Donald Trump on Thursday said that the US delegation had a "very good" talk with Russian President Vladimir Putin on the Ukraine peace proposal. The US delegation the "impression" that Moscow "would like to end the war."

On Wednesday, US Special Envoy Steve Witkoff and Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner held five-hour-long talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Moscow.

"Putin had a very good meeting yesterday with Kushner and with Witkoff. What comes out of that meeting, I can't tell you because it does take two to tango." Trump told reporters in Oval Office.

"He (Putin) would like to end the war, that was their impression."

What happens now, however, is unclear, Trump said. "We have something pretty well worked out (with Ukraine)".

Senior Kremlin adviser Yuri Ushakov said on Wednesday that the meeting was one of the most extensive exchanges between Washington and Moscow since the conflict began, but "no compromise" was reached on territorial issues.

"We are no closer to resolving the crisis in Ukraine, and there is much work to be done," he said.

He added that Ukraine's push for NATO membership was a key question.

Meanwhile Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, speaking in Dublin, said Kyiv would evaluate the outcome of the Moscow discussions. "It is important that everything is fair and open, so that there are no games behind Ukraine's back." *—ANI*

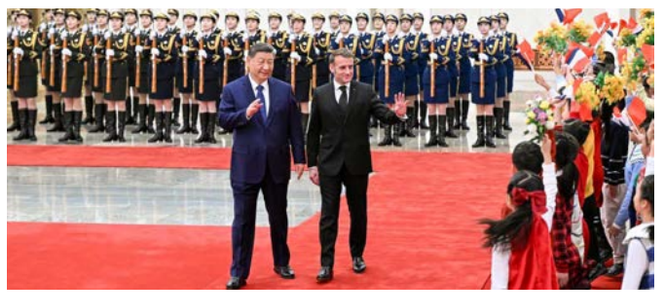
Xi, Macron agree to cooperate for global peace and trade

BEIJING, 4 DEC

China and France pledged deeper cooperation on global issues like the war in Ukraine and trade, as France prepares to take on the presidency of the Group of Seven (G7) next year.

French President Emmanuel Macron met China's Xi Jinping on Thursday, while on a three-day state visit focusing on trade and diplomacy.

Macron is attempting to involve Beijing in pressuring Russia to agree to a ceasefire with Ukraine. Xi did not say whether he would respond to France's call, but said, "China supports all efforts for peace".



China has provided strong diplomatic support to Russia after it invaded Ukraine.

Xi also pledged USD 100 million to Gaza.

Xi said that both sides agreed to greater economic cooperation in aerospace, nuclear energy, and new areas like green industries and AI. *—PTI*

MUNIR TO BUY IT?

Pak to sell nat'l airlines for IMF funds

ISLAMABAD, 4 DEC

Pakistan is set to hold the bidding to sell the state-owned airline after last year's attempt failed to secure a buyer, state media reported on Wednesday.

The Pakistan government is trying to sell loss-making Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) as envisaged under a USD 7 billion International Monetary Fund (IMF) programme.

Fed up with the piling up losses, the government last year made a determined bid to sell it, but it could not get an attractive offer and cancelled the plan.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif held a meeting with all corporate entities and company representatives participating in the privatisation process, according to a press release by state broadcaster PTV News.

The Pakistan International Airlines *PHOTO: ANI*

- Field Marshal Asim Munir has indirect control over the Fauji Foundation, which is one of the three bidders that the Pakistan government has approved so far.

"PIA's bidding will take place on 23 December, which will be broadcast live on all media," it quoted the Prime Minister as saying.

Four Pakistani firms have been cleared to take part in the bidding: Fauji Fertiliser, Habib Rafique, Younus Brothers and Airblue.

Notably, Army chief Field Marshal Asim Munir appoints the Quartermaster General (QMG), who sits on the Central Board of Directors of the Fauji Foundation which owns Fauji Fertiliser.

Munir holds indirect influence over the Fauji Foundation due to the military's institutional control.

However, Sharif said, "we are ensuring transparency and merit in the privatisation process of PIA".

The bidding would be the country's first major privatisation in nearly two decades. *—Agencies*

Houthis free Indian seaman Raveendran after 5 months

NEW DELHI, 4 DEC

After being detained for almost five months in Yemen, Indian crew member Anilkumar Raveendran, who was part of the Liberian-flagged, Greek-owned bulk carrier 'MV Eternity C,' which was attacked by Houthi rebels in July, has been released from, the Ministry of External Affairs stated on Thursday.

The MEA stated that Raveendran had been detained by the rebels in Yemen from 7 July, 2025, after he was captured during an attack on the ship.

The MEA noted that Raveendran reached Muscat on Wednesday and is expected to return to India soon.

The Centre had been actively coordinating with many parties to secure his safe release.

The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said that Anilkumar Raveendran (left) had arrived in Muscat on Wednesday *PHOTO: X*

A total of 10 crew members, including Raveendran, of the cargo vessel 'Eternity C,' which was attacked by the Houthi rebels in July, have been freed and transferred from Sanaa to Oman, 'Gulf News' reported.

The Greek-owned vessel 'Eternity C' was struck by drones launched by Houthi militants off the coast of Yemen in July. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Gold falls Rs 600 to Rs 1,31,600/10g

NEW DELHI, 4 DEC

Gold prices fell by Rs 600 to Rs 1,31,600 per 10 grams in the national capital on Thursday, following weak global trends and investor caution ahead of the US Federal Reserve's policy meeting next week. The precious metal of 99.9 per cent purity had closed at Rs 1,32,200 per 10 grams on Wednesday. Silver extended its losses for the second straight day, depreciating by Rs 900 to Rs 1,80,000 per kilogram (inclusive of all taxes) from the previous close of Rs 1,80,900 per kg. Globally, spot gold slipped by 0.15 per cent to USD 4,197.10 per ounce. He noted that the latest US ADP employment report showed that payrolls in November declined, which is the worst data since 2023, raising the bets on a potential rate cut by the Federal Reserve. *—PTI*

NIT makes waste treatment for 'dhobi ghats'

NEW DELHI, 4 DEC

Researchers at the National Institute of Technology (NIT), Rourkela, have designed a nature-based wastewater treatment innovation targeted towards revitalising India's "dhobi ghats" and protecting urban water bodies. Dhobi ghats, traditional laundry spaces, still serve as socio-economic support in many Indian cities. Due to acute water shortages, the availability of open water is limited. Simultaneously, untreated laundry wastewater contaminates aquatic ecosystems. The team has created a low-cost, chemical-free, and energy-independent wastewater treatment solution - Constructed Wetland-Microbial Fuel Cell (CW-MFC) System - by merging wetland plants, engineered filtration layers, and electricity producing microorganisms. The wastewater treatment uses natural things such as gravel, sand and plants. *—PTI*

Ultraviolette bags $45M capital from Zoho, Lingotto

NEW DELHI, 4 DEC

Electric two-wheeler maker Ultraviolette Automotive on Thursday said it has secured USD 45 million as part of its ongoing Series E funding round. The latest infusion comes from leading Indian technology company Zoho Corporation, and Lingotto one of Europe's largest investment management companies. The investment will accelerate the company's journey towards scaling into India and global markets. Ultraviolette recently launched the X-47 Crossover electric motorcycle. It has expanded presence to 30 cities across India in a span of 12 months and is expanding to 100 cities by mid-2026. *—PTI*

Airtel-Nokia tie-up to help developers with new earnings

NEW DELHI, 4 DEC

Finnish telecom company Nokia has partnered with Bharti Airtel to make network capabilities available to third-party developers for building new technology solutions and open up new monetisation opportunities. Following successful trials, Airtel's network APIs (Application Programming Interface) will be available on a subscription basis to an established ecosystem of developers, system integrators and enterprises using Nokia's Network as Code platform, Nokia said in a statement. The collaboration will enable the developer community to seamlessly build advanced solutions leveraging the Airtel network's robust capabilities such as AI, 5G, edge computing and more. Network APIs allow operators to virtualise parts of their networks and provide tailored data and features to developers. *—PTI*

Rupee recovers from record low level

Rupee rises 19 paise to close at 89.96 against the US dollar

MUMBAI, 4 DEC

The rupee rebounded from its all-time low levels and appreciated by 19 paise to close at 89.96 against the US dollar on Thursday, on softness in the US dollar index and on reports of the Reserve Bank of India's supposed intervention.

Forex traders said the greenback fell after ADP non-farm payroll data came in sharply below forecast, and the softness in the US dollar index supported the rupee at lower levels.

The rupee opened weak earlier in the day and touched a fresh all-time low of 90.43 amid selling pressure from foreign investors and rising crude oil prices. The delay over the announcement of the India-US trade deal has also weighed on the rupee.

At the end of Thursday's trading session, the rupee was quoted at 89.96 (provisional), up 19 paise over its last close.

On Wednesday, the rupee breached the 90-a-dollar level for the first time ever *PHOTO: PTI*

On Wednesday, the rupee breached the 90-a-dollar level for the first time to settle at a fresh all-time low of 90.15 against the greenback.

Meanwhile, Chief Economic Adviser V Anantha Nageswaran on Wednesday said the falling rupee is not affecting inflation or exports.

A falling rupee helps outward shipment but makes imports costlier.

Import-dependent sectors such as gems and jewellery, petroleum and electronics may see lower benefits due to a rise in input costs, putting pressure on inflationary expectations, he said at an event on Wednesday.

Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.01 per cent lower at 98.84.

Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, rose 0.22 per cent to USD 62.81 per barrel in futures trade.

The decision of the RBI Governor Sanjay Malhotra-headed six-member rate-setting panel will be announced on Friday. *—PTI*

Don't mistake falling rupee for weak currency: SBI report

NEW DELHI, 4 DEC

A sliding rupee is not a weak rupee even as it breaches the psychological barrier of 90 per US dollar, but it is expected to recover with a trade deal likely to be completed before March 2026, a report said.

Russian President Vladimir Putin is visiting India for a summit with Prime Minister Narendra Modi aimed at boosting energy, defence and economic ties. This comes as Moscow seeks to secure oil sales amid tightening Western sanctions, a research report from the SBI's Economic Research Department said.

However, India's crude imports are set to hit a low as the USA tightened sanctions and India's imports of Russian oil appear to taper, it said.

INR is the most depreciated currency, but it is not the most volatile, it added.

It said, once the rupee breached the 90 level, several exotic options like barriers were triggered, amplifying volatility and accelerating the pace of depreciation. *—PTI*

Fitch ups FY'26 GDP growth to 7.4%

NEW DELHI, 4 DEC

Fitch Ratings on Thursday raised India's GDP growth forecast for the current fiscal to 7.4 per cent, from 6.9 per cent, on increased consumer spending and improved sentiment boosted by GST reforms.

It said falling inflation gives the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) room for one more policy rate cut in December to 5.25 per cent, following 100 bp of cuts in 2025 so far.

Fitch said GDP growth accelerated further in the July-September quarter to 8.2 per cent, from 7.8 per cent in the April-June quarter.

"Growth will ease over the remainder of the financial year 2025-26 (to end-March), but we have raised our full-year growth forecast to 7.4 per cent, from 6.9 per cent in September," Fitch said in its Global Economic Outlook report for December.

Private consumer spending is the main driver of growth, supported by strong real income dynamics, increased consumer sentiment, and the impact of recently implemented goods and services tax (GST) reforms.

Effective 22 September, GST on about 375 items has been slashed, making over 99 per cent of consumption items cheaper. Fitch expects GDP growth to slow to 6.4 per cent in FY'27.

It projected private investment to pick up in the second half of the next fiscal (2026-27) as financial conditions loosen.

Consumer price inflation fell to an all-time low of 0.3 per cent in October, driven by lower food and drink prices.

RBI's monetary policy committee is slated to announce its policy review on Friday. *—PTI*

Sensex tanks, Nifty slips too

MUMBAI, 4 DEC

Stock markets declined on Tuesday, with the benchmark Sensex tumbling nearly 504 points due to selling in blue-chip bank stocks and Reliance Industries, and persistent foreign fund outflows.

Falling for the third straight session, the 30-share BSE Sensex tumbled 503.63 points or 0.59 per cent to settle at 85,138.27. During the day, the benchmark tanked 588.9 points or 0.68 per cent to hit a low of 85,053. The index had scaled a record high level in intra-day trade in the previous session, but closed lower due to profit booking in the second half.

The 50-share NSE Nifty declined by 143.55 points or 0.55 per cent to 26,032.20.

Among Sensex firms, Axis Bank, HDFC Bank, Reliance Industries, ICICI Bank, Bharat Electronics and Larsen & Toubro were the biggest laggards. However, Asian Paints, Maruti, Bharti Airtel and Bajaj Finance were among the gainers.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 1,171.31 crore on Monday, while Domestic Institutional Investors (DIIs) bought stocks worth Rs 2,558.93 crore, according to exchange data.

- Among Sensex firms, Axis Bank, HDFC Bank, Reliance Industries, ICICI Bank, Bharat Electronics and Larsen & Toubro were the biggest laggards

In Asian markets, Shanghai's SSE Composite index settled lower while South Korea's Kospi, Japan's Nikkei 225 index and Hong Kong's Hang Seng index ended in positive territory. Markets in Europe were trading higher. US markets ended lower. *—PTI*

RS 871 CR NEPHROPLUS IPO OPENS ON 10 DEC

NEW DELHI, 4 DEC

Dialysis services provider Nephrocare Health Services Ltd, known for its brand NephroPlus, on Thursday announced a price band of Rs 438-460 per share for its upcoming Initial Public Offering (IPO), valuing the company at over Rs 4,600 crore.

The Hyderabad-based company's Rs 871-crore IPO will open for public subscription on 10 December and conclude on 12 December. Anchor bidding will take place on 9 December, according to its public announcement.

The IPO is a combination of a fresh issue of shares aggregating to Rs 353.4 crore and an Offer For Sale of 1.12 crore shares valued Rs 517.6 crore, at the upper end, taking the total issue size to Rs 871 crore.

The company proposes to utilise Rs 129.1 crore for opening of new dialysis clinics in India; Rs 136 crore payment of debt; and the balance for general corporate purposes. NephroPlus will make its market debut on 17 December. It is the most widely distributed dialysis network in India. *—PTI*

Adani-Google AI data Centre gets 480 acres in Visakhapatnam

AMARAVATI, 4 DEC

Andhra Pradesh government has allotted 480 acres of land in Visakhapatnam and Anakapalli districts to Adani Infra (India) Pvt Ltd, a 'notified partner' of Raiden Infotech India.

Raiden Infotech India, a Google company, will set up 1 GW AI Data Centres in the state.

The Google entity had informed the state government earlier that Adani Infra (India) Pvt Ltd, AdaniConneX India Pvt Ltd, Adani Power India Pvt Ltd, Bharti Airtel Ltd, Nxtra Data Ltd and Nxtra Vizag Limited (subsidiary of Bharti Airtel) as 'notified partners'.

Raiden has requested that all three land parcels identified by Andhra Pradesh Industrial Infrastructure Corporation Ltd (APIIC) may be allotted to Adani Infra (India), as the primary notified partner, subject to completing survey and handing over possession.

Raiden Infotech India Pvt Ltd, which is setting up data centres in a phased manner, with a cumulative investment of over Rs 87,500 crore in Andhra Pradesh will get back Rs 22,000 crore as incentives from the state government.

Gautam Adani with Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu on Thursday *PHOTO: @GAUTAM_ADANI*

- Raiden Infotech India, a Google company, will set up 1 GW AI Data Centres in the state.

Data centre capacity is measured by the power it consumes. The planned 1 GW (1,000 MW of electricity consumption at full capacity operation) facility in Visakhapatnam is expected to use electricity equivalent to nearly 50 per cent of Mumbai's annual consumption. *—PTI*

US team may visit India next week for trade talks: Sources

NEW DELHI, 4 DEC

A team of officials from the US is expected to visit India next week for talks on the proposed bilateral trade agreement, sources said on Thursday.

The visit is crucial as India and the US are working to finalise the first tranche of the pact. This visit of the US officials would be the second after the imposition of a 25 per cent tariff and an additional 25 per cent penalty on Indian goods entering the American market for buying Russian crude oil.

Earlier, the team had visited on 16 September. On 22 September, Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal also led an official delegation to the US for trade talks.

The next week's visit would be important as Agrawal has recently stated that India is hopeful of reaching a framework trade deal with the US this year itself, which should address the tariff issue to the benefit of Indian exporters.

India and the US are having two parallel negotiations - one on a framework trade deal to address tariffs and another on a comprehensive trade deal. *—PTI*

Bearys Group wins prestigious 'Sword of Honour' award

LONDON, 4 DEC

Bearys Group has received the prestigious Sword of Honour from the British Safety Council for the NTT Global Data Centre in Ambattur, Chennai, a facility developed by the company.

The award, regarded as one of the highest international recognitions for workplace safety, health and environmental management, was presented at a ceremony held on 28 November, 2025 at Drapers' Hall in London. Founder Syed Mohamed Beary and GM (Quality & HSE) Balasubramanian received the honour on behalf of the Bearys Group.

The Sword of Honour is awarded only to organisations that secure a Five-Star rating in the British Safety Council's comprehensive Health and Safety Audit and subsequently demonstrate exceptional performance in the adjudication process. With this recognition, the NTT Chennai project now joins a select group of facilities worldwide that have met these stringent standards.

Founder Syed Mohamed Beary said the honour motivates the organisation to continue upholding high safety standards.

Micron Technology to exit consumer memory business

NEW DELHI, 4 DEC

Micron Technology, Inc, a major player in innovative memory and storage solutions, on Thursday announced its decision to exit the Crucial consumer business, including the sale of Crucial consumer-branded products at key retailers, e-tailers and distributors worldwide.

The company said in a press release that it will continue Crucial consumer product shipments through the consumer channel until the end of fiscal Q2 (February 2026).

The company will work closely with partners and customers through this transition and will provide continued warranty service and support for Crucial products. Micron will continue to support the sale of Micron-branded enterprise products to commercial channel customers globally, the release added.

"The AI-driven growth in the data centre has led to a surge in demand for memory and storage," said Sumit Sadana, EVP and Chief Business Officer at Micron Technology.

Micron Technology, Inc is an industry leader in innovative memory and storage solutions, transforming how the world uses information to enrich life for all. Micron delivers a rich portfolio of high-performance DRAM, NAND, and NOR memory and storage products. *—ANI*

IN LOK SABHA

FM moves Health Secy se Nat'l Secy Cess Bill

NEW DELHI, 4 DEC

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Thursday moved The Health Security se National Security Cess Bill, 2025, in Lok Sabha for consideration and passing in the Lok Sabha.

Speaking in the Lok Sabha, she said, "A cess is being imposed because the GST system taxes consumption, and even today pan masala is taxed under GST at 28 per cent plus compensation cess. Since the compensation cess is going to end, that portion will shift into a 40 per cent cess."

"Excise taxes production. But pan masala cannot be taxed on production because it is not classified as an excisable product. So, while cigarettes were brought under excise duty and ideally pan masala should have been included too, it cannot be added because it is not in the excise category. Therefore, cigarettes now face excise duty - as they should, with more than 40 per cent tax so they are not cheaply available - but pan masala cannot be taxed this way. Hence, through the new law, the government is imposing a production-based tax in the form of a cess." Penalties include Rs 10,000 fine and may go up to Rs 1 crore and have imprisonment of one to five years.

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman speaks in the Parliament on Thursday *PHOTO: PTI*

OPPN CLAIMS BILL WILL HURT MSME SECTOR

DMK MP Sumathi accused the Centre of relying excessively on cesses to raise revenue. RJD member Sudhakar Singh wondered how the imposition of cess would prevent the consumption of tobacco and pan masala. On the lines of Bihar, the production and sale of pan masala and related products should be banned, he demanded.

Sumathi claimed that Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) would be "hit the hardest" by it. Congress MP Varun Chaudhary warned the proposed legislation would revive "inspector raj" and argued that a capacity-based cess would increase bureaucratic interference. "What will happen to small factories?" he wondered. *—PTI*

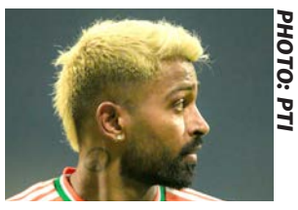


PHOTO: PTI

Fan frenzy for Hardik Pandya forces venue shift

HYDERABAD, 4 DEC

Fan frenzy over star India all-rounder Hardik Pandya forced the organisers to shift the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy match between his team Baroda and Gujarat to a more secure Rajiv Gandhi International Stadium from a nondescript Gymkhana ground here on Thursday. The game, which Baroda won by eight wickets, was moved due to an unexpected crowd interest and security concerns in Hardik's presence. It was the second competitive game for the Indian all-rounder since returning from a two-month-long injury break. He will be seen in India colours in the upcoming five-match T20 series against South Africa beginning in Cuttack on 9 December.—*PTI*

Yuvraj Sandhu leads by three shots in Jaipur

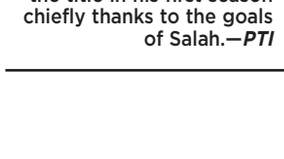
JAIPUR, 4 DEC

Indian golfer Yuvraj Sandhu carded an impressive third-round score of four-under 66 to establish a three-shot lead with a total of 16-under 194 at the Jaipur Open here on Thursday. Sandhu (65-63-66), who was in second place and one shot off the lead at the start of round three, produced an eagle, four birdies and two bogeys during his 66 to take control in the penultimate round. Sandhu is in pursuit of his sixth PGTI title this season. If Yuvraj does go on to bag his sixth win of 2025, he would match the PGTI record for most titles in a season set by Manu Gandas in 2022. Kushal Singh (64-63-70), the halfway leader by one shot, had a mixed day as he came up with a 70 punctuated by four birdies and two double-bogeys that saw him slip to second place at 13-under 197.—*PTI*

Ravindra's 171, Latham's 145 give NZ a 481-run lead

CHRISTCHURCH, 4 DEC

Rachin Ravindra, at his best, can make it look like he is batting on a different pitch. He was at his best on Thursday, his 176 helping New Zealand take complete control of the first test against the West Indies on the third day. Ravindra put on 279 for New Zealand's third wicket, batting for most of the last two sessions with his captain, Tom Latham, who made 145. Both were out in sight of stumps at which New Zealand was 417-4, a lead of 481 after leading by 64 on the first innings. New Zealand 231 and 417 for 4 (Ravindra 176, Latham 145, Roach 2-61) lead West Indies 167 by 481 runs.—*PTI*



X/@LIVERPOOL

Salah dropped by Liverpool for 2nd straight game

LIVERPOOL, 4 DEC

Mohamed Salah was left out of Liverpool's starting lineup for the second straight Premier League match by manager Arne Slot. Salah was named on the bench for the home game against Sunderland on Wednesday, but the Egypt international came on at the start of the second half as Liverpool rallied from a goal down to draw 1-1. On Sunday, Salah was an unused substitute in Liverpool's 2-0 win at West Ham. That marked the first time Salah hadn't started a league game under Slot, who took charge in the off-season of 2024 and won the title in his first season chiefly thanks to the goals of Salah.—*PTI*

Joe Root scores maiden Test century in Australia

This keeps England afloat on the 1st day of the 2nd Ashes Test

BRISBANE, 4 DEC

Joe Root has finally scored a hundred in an Ashes test for England in Australia, checking off one of the few milestones missing from his impressive cricket CV.Test cricket's No. 1-ranked batter ended a 15-test century drought Down Under dating to 2013 when he reached triple figures on Thursday in the first night session of the second test at the Gabba. Root is on his fourth Ashes tour to Australia, where his previous highest test score was 89.

Joe Root *PHOTO: PTI*

Australia's Mitchell Starc in action in the second Ashes Test in Brisbane *PHOTO: PTI*

He scored 0 and 8 in the eight-wicket loss in the series-opener in Perth last month, increasing the pressure on his form..Root was 88 not out at drinks midway through the night session. He hit another boundary next ball to go to 96.With Root on 98, Will Jacks chased a wild shot against Mitchell Starc and was out for 19 to end their 40-run stand. England was 251-7.

Starc becomes highest wicket-taker

Australian veteran Mitchell Starc became the most prolific left-arm paceman in Test history on Thursday, surpassing Pakistan great Wasim Akram.

The 35-year-old bagged England's Harry Brook at the Gabba in Brisbane on day one of the day-night second Ashes Test for his 415th wicket since his debut at the same ground 14 years ago. It moved him past Akram, widely recognised as the greatest left-arm bowler the sport has seen. Akram played 104 Tests for his 414 wickets, with Starc reaching the milestone in his 102nd, helped by a career-best 7-58 in the first innings of the opening Ashes Test at Perth.

"Wasim's still a far better bowler than I am," said Starc. "So as far as I'm concerned, he's still the pinnacle of left-armers and certainly he's right up there with the best bowlers to ever play the game. —*PTI*

VIRAT HAS CONFIDENCE

Gavaskar: Kohli's 2nd successive ton looked inevitable

RAIPUR, 4 DEC

Virat Kohli's second successive ton during the second ODI against South Africa here seemed "inevitable" as the stalwart got off the mark with a six, carrying the confidence of his first-game heroics, feels former India captain Sunil Gavaskar on Thursday.

Kohli struck 102 off 93 balls here on Wednesday, his 53rd ton in the 50-over format and 84th international hundred of his career, although India lost the match by four wickets. He had scored 135 off 120 deliveries in India's 17-run win in the first match in Ranchi on 30 November.

"To be honest, at no point did it look like he wasn't going to get a hundred. From the first ball he faced, it felt as if he was carrying on from Ranchi," JioStar expert Gavaskar said.

"He got off the mark with a hook for six, a shot he doesn't often play in the air, which showed the confidence from his previous hundred. After that, unless something unfortunate happened, the hundred always seemed inevitable."

Kohli and Ruturaj Gaikwad (105 off 83 balls) rewrote the record for India's highest third-wicket stand in ODIs, putting on a superb 195-run partnership.

"The partnership with Ruturaj was excellent. Ruturaj's first ball was a tough bouncer from Jansen, coming right after he had dismissed Jaiswal. He managed to put it away for four, and you could immediately see Kohli go down the pitch to comfort him.

"Ruturaj would've been nervous after getting out to a brilliant catch earlier, and whatever Kohli told him clearly lifted him; the next ball he played very confidently off the front foot," said the legendary batter.

Gavaskar lauded Kohli for guiding Gaikwad after a nervy start. —*PTI*

JERUSALEM MASTERS

Erigaisi defeats Viswanathan

JERUSALEM, 4 DEC

Grandmaster Arjun Erigaisi defeated five-time world champion Viswanathan Anand in an all-Indian final to clinch the Jerusalem Masters title here.

After the duo drew the opening rapid games, Erigaisi struck in the first Blitz tie-break match by winning with the white pieces to take a decisive lead in the fixture.

The 22-year-old also held a winning position in the second blitz encounter before settling for a draw, which was enough to secure him the fixture 2.5-1.5 and the title, according to a report by 'chessbase.com'.

"It wasn't easy. There were a lot of challenges. My quality wasn't the best. I'm just glad I managed to make it through," Arjun told the organisers in an interview after winning the title.

Grandmaster Arjun Erigaisi *PHOTO: PTI*

"Today, both the matches (versus Peter Svidler and then Anand) were very tense. In the first game against Anand sir, we both missed our chances. But in blitz, I think I played quite well," he added.

On losing control of Game 1 in the final despite having a white pieces advantage, Erigaisi said that he was worried after "messing up" but managed to recover.

"During the game, I was very worried. I knew I was winning, and I knew I messed it up. So, I was definitely worried. But okay, all I had to do was to fight back, and that is what I was trying to do."

With the win, Erigaisi pocketed USD 55,000 while Anand walked away with USD 35,000.

Arjun had defeated Russian Grandmaster Peter Svidler in his last four-stage fixture, while Anand outplayed reigning World Blitz champion Ian Nepomniachtchi in the semi-final. —*PTI*

India's real test starts in FIH Jr WC against Belgium in QFs

CHENNAI, 4 DEC

All boxes ticked so far in a relatively easy pool campaign, the real test for India will start when they take on Belgium in the quarterfinals of the FIH Men's Junior Hockey World Cup here on Friday.

Placed in Pool B alongside Chile, Oman and Switzerland, India romped to the knockout round, scoring 29 goals and conceding none, the best strike rate among all 24 teams.

But the PR Sreejesh-coach team knows very well that those results will hardly have any significance as tougher teams await it in the business end of the tournament.

Any slip-up from here would crush India's dream of reclaiming the crown at home after nine years. India last won the title in Lucknow in 2016. So far, India looked on course to repeat the feat with some stellar performances in the pool stages, scoring 18 field goals, nine from penalty corners and two from penalty strokes. But it won't be easy for the Indians from here on, and any complacency might throw them out of the title reckoning.

India's true challenge begins on Friday as it faces Belgium in the quarterfinals *PHOTO: PTI*

The Indians ruled the roost in the first two games against Chile and Oman, scoring goals at will with the backline hardly being bothered. Even though the hosts beat Switzerland 5-0, India's defence was tested by the Swiss, with goalkeeper Prince Deep Singh and Bikramjit Singh making some fantastic saves to keep their clean sheet.

Penalty corner conversions, which remain a concern, made some inroads with Shila Nand Lakra finding the net twice in India's last match. The Indian strikers made merry in the pool stages with Dilraj Singh (6 goals), Manmeet (5), Arshdeep Singh (4), Ajeet Yadav and Gurjot Singh (2) all shining bright. —*PTI*

Narine becomes first cricketer to take 600 T20 wickets

DUBAI, 4 DEC

Mystery spinner Sunil Narine etched his name in history on Wednesday by becoming the first bowler to claim 600 wickets in competitive T20 cricket.

He achieved the landmark during the ILT20 match for his franchise, Abu Dhabi Knight Riders, against Sharjah Warriorz. After the game, the Abu Dhabi Knight Riders presented Narine with a special edition jersey bearing the number 600 to commemorate the unprecedented feat.

The 37-year-old Trinidadian reached the milestone by dismissing Tom Abell, underlining his status as one of the greatest T20 bowlers of all time.

Over the years, Narine has represented Kolkata Knight Riders, Abu Dhabi Knight Riders, Trinbago Knight Riders and Los Angeles Knight Riders across leagues worldwide.

"The Knight Riders family stands immensely proud of Narine's extraordinary achievement, recognising that this record may well stand the test of time as one of cricket's most enduring milestones," the franchise said in a press release on Thursday. —*PTI*

Tanvi, Ashmita lead Indian shuttlers

GUWAHATI, 4 DEC

Indian shuttlers, including Tanvi Sharma and Ashmita Chaliha, continued the country's dominance at the Guwahati Masters Super 100 badminton tournament, the duo entering the quarterfinals in women's singles here on Thursday.

The 41st-ranked and eighth-seeded Tanvi drubbed Thailand's Passa-Orn Phannachet 21-17, 23-21 in straight games in their women's singles pre-quarterfinals match.

World-ranked 96th Chaliha got the better of fifth-seeded compatriot Anmol Kharb 16-21, 21-17, 21-16 after making a fine comeback after losing the first game against her 49-ranked opponent.

India's Isharani Baruah beat compatriot Shreya Lele 21-13, 10-21, 21-12 in their women's singles pre-quarterfinals.

Tushar Suveer won his men's singles round-of-16 match against Indonesia's Bismo Raya Oktora 21-17 18-21 21-15.

In a mixed doubles pre-quarterfinals match, the Indian duo of Ruthvika Shivani Gadde and Rohan Kapoor defeated Malaysia's Wee Yee Hern and Vannee Gobi 21-19, 21-14 to progress further in the tournament. —*PTI*

Pickleball: Chennai Super Warriors qualify for playoffs

NEW DELHI, 4 DEC

Chennai Super Warriors became the first team to seal a play-off berth by beating Bengaluru Blasters 4-2 in the Indian Pickleball League here on Thursday.Chennai are leading the table with 12 points from four wins, followed by Hyderabad.

Lucknow are sitting in third place with Gurgaon fourth. Bengaluru are fifth, and a winless Mumbai are placed at the bottom.

Bengaluru Blasters ran into the unbeaten Chennai Super Warriors with Phuc Huynh giving them the ideal launch by outlasting Aman Patel 15-13 in men's singles.However, Chennai's pair of Mitchell Hargreaves and Harsh Mehta edged Huynh and Arjun Singh 15-12 in a gritty, point-for-point kitchen-line battle.

Roos van Reek then took charge, racing to a 10-5 lead before closing out a commanding 15-5 win her fourth straight in the league over Pei Chuan Kao.Bengaluru snapped Chennai's unbeaten women's doubles run. —*PTI*

SPANISH LEAGUE

Mbappe scores 2 goals as Real wins 3-0

MADRID, 4 DEC

Kylian Mbappe scored twice and had an assist as Real Madrid beat Athletic Bilbao 3-0 to end a three-match winless streak in the Spanish league on Wednesday night.

Eduardo Camavinga also found the net for Madrid as it moved back within one point of Barcelona, which beat Atletico Madrid 3-1 on Tuesday.

Both 19th-round matches were moved forward because Madrid, Barcelona, Athletic, and Atletico will be playing in the Spanish Super Cup in January in Saudi Arabia.

Madrid was coming off league draws at Girona, Elche, and Rayo Vallecano. It was Madrid's second win in its last six matches in all competitions. "It was important, after three away draws, to get back to winning on the road, " Madrid coach Xabi Alonso said. "The team came out to play and win the match from the first minute, with good focus, intensity, and rhythm.

It was probably our best match this season. Mbappé has scored seven goals in his last three matches in all competitions. He had scored once against Girona and netted four times at Olympiakos in a 4-3 Champions League win.

The France star has 30 goals in 24 appearances between club and country this season and is the leading scorer in both the Spanish league and the Champions League, with nine goals, 16 goals.

Camavinga added to the lead with a header from close range in the 42nd after an assist by Mbappé, and the France international got his second goal with a nice shot from nearly 30 meters out in the 59th.

"At times I think to myself, 'How lucky I am to have him on my team and not have to face him, except maybe against France," said Madrid goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois, a Belgian international. "He's unstoppable; we really enjoy watching him play." —*PTI*

SELECTORS SET TO INCLUDE NEW FACES IN PAKISTAN SQUAD

LAHORE, 4 DEC

The Pakistan Cricket Board's selectors are not ruling out the possibility of including some new faces in the T20 squad that will be playing three matches in Sri Lanka from 7 to 11 January.

This is because the PCB had issued NOC to six main players to appear in the Big Bash League in Australia, which runs from 14 December to the end of January, before it announced the three-match series in Dambulla this week.This is the first time so many Pakistani players are taking part in the BBL.—*PTI*